健速
Takehaya

無題
6

健速 たけはや

「あの日々をもういちど」(HJ文庫)で作家デビュー。最近、ようやく引っ越し荷物の整理が終了。自宅で普通に生活できるようになった。しかしそこで食器不足という新たな問題が発覚、頭を痛めている。

ポコ

兵庫出身のイラストレーター。
好物はやきそば。最近は自分で作る塩焼きそばにハマリ中。

カバーイラスト／ポコ　装丁／渡辺宏一

た03-02-06

健速

六畳間の侵略者!? 6

HJ文庫

HOBBY JAPAN

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地上侵略を目論むという地底人の少女・キリハ。しかし彼女の活動といえば、河川の清掃など地域密着なものばかり。本当に侵略をする気があるのか？孝太郎がいぶかしむなか事態は急変！政府の対・地底人戦闘部隊《太陽部隊サンレンジャー》が現れて……。超圧縮型ラブコメディ、第六巻では、ついに謎多き美少女・キリハの真実が明らかになる!?

HOBBY JAPAN

「……あれはデートねっ、間違いなくっ！」
六畳間の侵略者!? 6

地底帝国に狙われた地上を守るため、
正義の戦士よ立ち上がれ！

はじまります！

太陽部隊 サンレンジャー VS 悪の地底帝国

キリハは孝太郎の手を取り、ゴンドラへ飛び込んでいった。
えいっ

ころな荘の関係者たち

主人公
里見孝太郎
ころな荘一〇六号室の、いちおうの借主で主人公。

先輩
桜庭晴海
孝太郎の所属する編み物部の部長で、一年先輩。ちょっと病弱。

悪友
松平賢治
孝太郎の幼なじみで親友。

大家
笠置静香
孝太郎の同級生でころな荘の大家さん。

幽霊
東本願早苗
想い出のころな荘一〇六号室に取り憑き、独占を狙う幽霊。

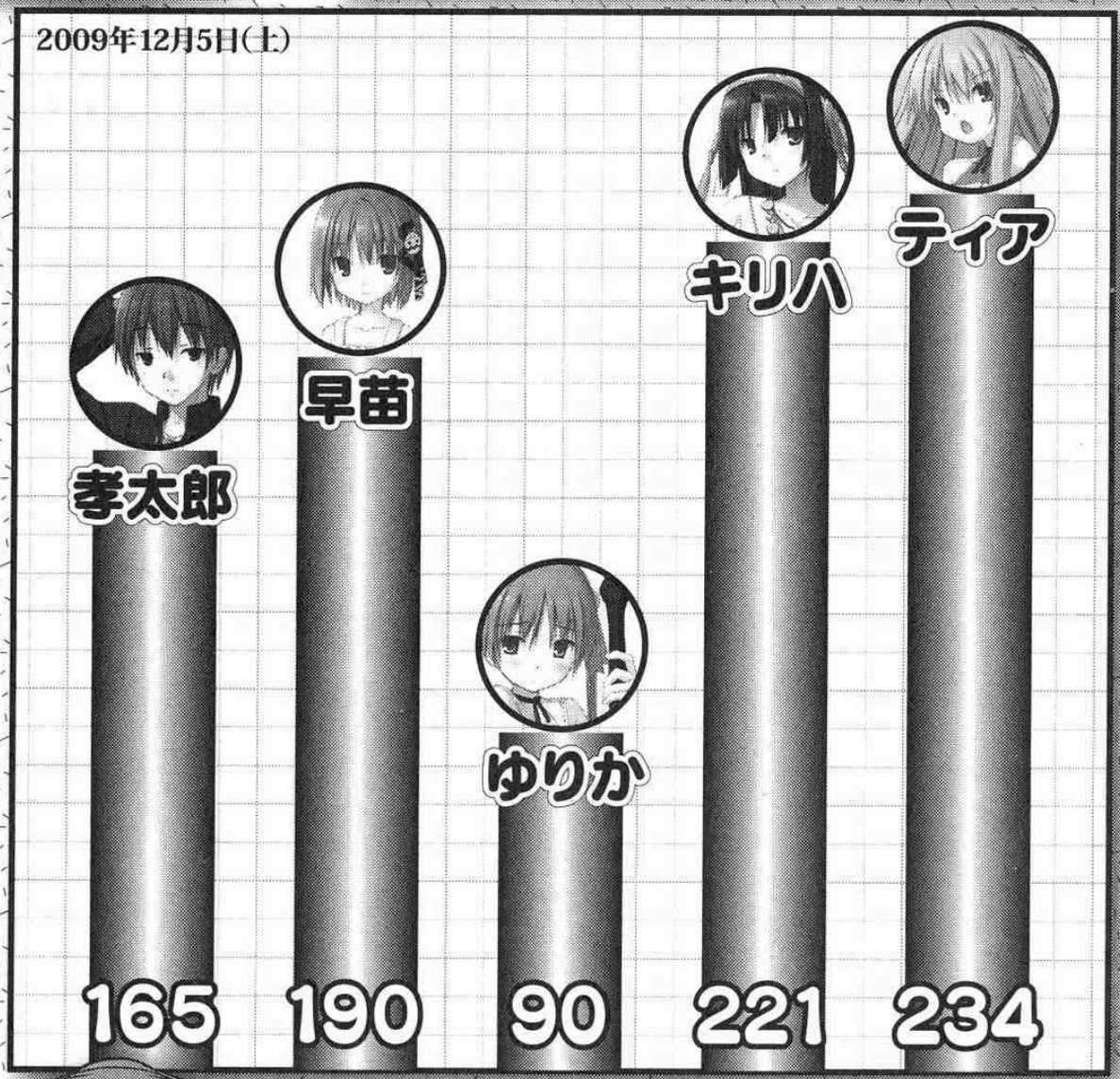
地底人
クラノ＝キリハ
一〇六号室を祭壇化、それを足がかりとして地上侵略を狙う地底人。

コスプレイヤー?
虹野ゆりか
自称"魔法少女"。一〇六号室に危機が迫っていると主張する。

宇宙人
ティアミリス・グレ・フォルトーゼ
皇位継承の試練のため一〇六号室とその住人の支配を狙う宇宙人。

ルースカニア・ナイ・パルドムシーハ
ティアの付き人で世話係。

一目瞭然! Power balance in room 106

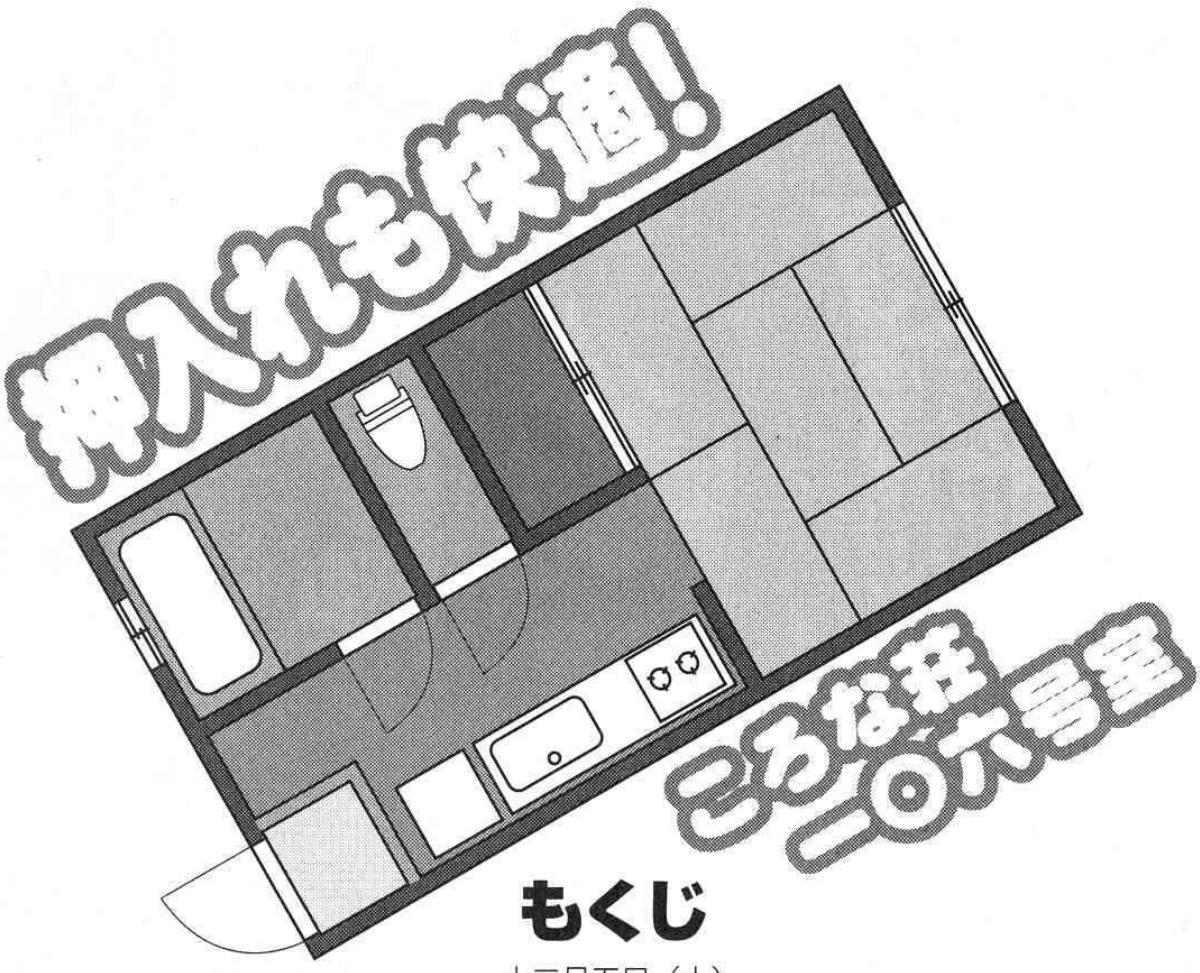


How to read the graph

- 1 cm of a tatami mat = 1 point
- 180 cm = the start points
- 5 people combined = 900 points (5 tatami mats)

– 1 tatami mat is used for furniture

The person who gathers all the points, will gain ownership of the room



もくじ

十二月五日（土）
急進派の影 ……007
十二月十日（木）
マフラーとアルバイト……056
十二月十三日（日）
侵略の意図 ……087
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十二月二十日（日）
クラノ＝キリハ ……246
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ジェットコースター……289
あとがき……306

Signs of the Radical Faction

Part 1

Saturday, December 5

Higashihongan Sanae was in a great mood.

“O~hohohoho♪”

She flew in circles above Koutarou and the others while laughing loudly. Her recently nonstop smile was shining brighter than ever.

“Hmph.”

In contrast, Theiamillis Gre Forthorthe was in a bad mood. Her sharp glare revealed her poor mood.

“Sanae-chan's victory!”

Sanae landed down in front of Koutarou while making a V sign.

“Amazing, good job.”

“Ehehehe~”

Koutarou patted a happy Sanae on the head.

“Sanae-sama is so strong at tennis.”

“Fufuh, Papa and Mama have trained me since I was small after all.”

Sanae proudly responded to Ruth's statement as she circled around to Koutarou's back.

“Hmm, then Sanae-chan's parents must be really good.”

“That's right!”

Having had her parents praised, Sanae was delighted. She clung onto Koutarou's back as always.

“Well then, let's go home before it gets cold!”

The time was now 3PM, so there was still some time before it got dark. However, since it was now December and winter had already begun, once it got dark it got cold right away.

Today, Koutarou and the others had used their Saturday to go to a sports park and play tennis. The participants were Koutarou, Sanae, Shizuka and the princess and assistant from Forthorthe; for a total of five people. Aside from Ruth, the rest of them were all athletic.

Koutarou, being a man on top of being athletic, was obviously good at tennis, but surprisingly enough, the strongest at tennis amongst the girls was Sanae.

Even as they headed home, Sanae was still in a good mood. There was quite a distance between the sports park and Corona House, but Sanae's excitement lasted throughout the journey.

“Praise me more, you bastard♪”

“Splendid, my lady.”

“It was not a big deal.”

Sanae kicked her legs in an adorable fashion fitting for her age as Koutarou continued along the sidewalk.

“Splendid or not, Koutarou was the amazing one.”

However, Theia was still in a bad mood. She couldn't accept that she had lost to Sanae.

“Your highness... fufufu...”

Seeing Theia like that, Ruth gently smiled as if watching over a younger sister.

“Don't be such a sore loser Theia. The body might have been Koutarou's, but I was the one moving it. So it was my victory♪”

“If I could do the same, I wouldn't have lost!”

What Theia couldn't accept was that Sanae had possessed Koutarou and used his body to play against her.

Similar to when they had played Jenga, Sanae had borrowed Koutarou's body to play. She could use her spiritual powers to control the racket, but it tired her and her accuracy would drop. A ghost's telekinesis, or poltergeist, had a wide range of use, but it wasn't suited for use over a long period of time.

Because of that, Sanae had possessed Koutarou. Doing that, she remained undefeated, resulting in her being in such a good mood.

However, it could be said that the reason that she won was Sanae's experience and Koutarou's athletic abilities.

If, for example, Sanae had played against Shizuka or Theia before she became a ghost, there was a possibility that she wouldn't stand a chance. That was why Theia was in such a bad mood.

“That might be true, but that means that this victory was thanks to the bond between me and Koutarou! Right, Koutarou?”

“Yes, yes, that's true.”

“Ah...”

But what bothered Theia even more was Sanae and Koutarou's relationship.

Sanae was able to manipulate Koutarou's body quite freely, and that was because Koutarou had accepted Sanae into his heart. If he had resisted, she probably wouldn't have been able to control him. Even if she could, the movements would come out as awkward. Playing an active sport in that condition would be impossible. Since she could, it meant that Koutarou was really trusting of Sanae.

So seeing how well they got along, Theia couldn't calm down.

If I was a ghost, would Koutarou let me do the same as Sanae?

“Koutarou, say it in a more loving fashion.”

“How would I do that- hey, what's wrong Theia?”

“Eh?”

A nearby voice rang out. Surprised by the close proximity of the voice, Theia looked up and saw Koutarou staring at her face with a worried look.

“You don't look so good, are you tired?”

“Ah, uhm, no, that's not it. I-I'm fine!”

“Really?”

Koutarou nodded but he kept staring at Theia's face. Being stared at with that earnest look, Theia was unable to calm down for a different reason. And as if to escape from his glance, she looked down.

As I thought, she seems to be feeling down...

Having looked at Theia for a while, that's what Koutarou decided in the end.

“Here.”

At that point, Koutarou presented his right hand to Theia.

“Koutarou?”

Not understanding the reason for the right hand, Theia looked at Koutarou and his hand.

During that time, Theia's brain was working as hard is it could to find an answer.

“...U-Uhm...”

Eventually, Theia reached a conclusion and took action. She reached out with both of her hands and grabbed onto Koutarou's right hand.

T-This is really what he means...

Theia could feel Koutarou's warmth through his hand. It felt like the parts touching were burning hot. However, Theia showed no signs of letting go;

instead she grabbed on even harder.

“Theia, what are you doing?”

Having had his hand grabbed all of a sudden, Koutarou looked at Theia with a confused look. The action Theia had taken was different from his intentions.

“Eh?”

“Your luggage. If you're tired, I'll carry it for you, so hand it over.”

It looked like Theia was tired, so Koutarou decided to carry her luggage for her.

“Hau...”

That was when Theia finally realized.

She understood why Koutarou had presented his right hand, that she was grabbing onto his hand, that it was her own misunderstanding and that this situation was confusing Koutarou.

“Uwawa, t-this is, uhm, this is!!”

Having understood everything, Theia panicked and hurriedly released Koutarou's hand.

“W-Wait, Koutarou! You're wrong, that's not what I meant!”

Theia tried to smooth things over and desperately began to make excuses. She was desperate to hide that she had misunderstood the situation.

“Hm? Aren't you tired?”

“T-That's not it- well, I am tired, but-! But-!”

Theia was so embarrassed she couldn't look at Koutarou. She desperately kept talking while staring down on the ground.

“In that case, here.”

And almost as if he had planned for it, Koutarou's hand enters Theia's vision.

Koutarou's hand...

At that moment, Theia recalled the sensation of Koutarou's hand. Remembering that feeling, her face began to heat up.

“N-No more, I... I-!”

Just as Theia was about to say something, Shizuka opened her mouth.

“Satomi-kun, Satomi-kun, isn't that Kiriha-san?”

“Where, landlord-san?”

“Over there.”

“...Ah, you're right!”

As Koutarou turned around, Theia could see his big back and Sanae clinging onto him.

“I—”

As she saw that, she cooled down instantly.

“Where?”

“Over there, Koutarou.”

“I got it, that's certainly Kiriha-san.”

Between Koutarou and Theia was Sanae, and their distances to Koutarou easily extinguished Theia's burning emotions.

“...”

Theia mortifyingly bit her lip and a new feeling began springing up from inside.

Just what am I so discouraged with...? What is leaving me so unsatisfied...?

Theia was deeply discouraged. She couldn't even care less about Kiriha's appearance.

“Your highness...”

However, unlike her master, Ruth was smiling.

Her highness will realize her own feelings any moment now...

Up until now, Theia had never let any stranger near her. She had never opened herself up to anyone but Ruth. That Theia now desired someone else. Ruth had always been waiting for that change.

Unaware of the complex feelings the master and servant from Forthorthe were feeling, Koutarou, Sanae and Shizuka stared at Kiriha.

“What's she doing?”

“Looks like she's... cleaning?”

Kiriha was in front of the city hall. There, a lot of people from the neighborhood had gathered, and Kiriha was mixed in with them.

She was wearing her native kimono that she wore in private, in the middle of sorting large plastic bags. The bags were full of garbage that had been picked up and gathered throughout the day.

In other words, she was helping the neighborhood association clean up.

But why is she picking up garbage? And why is she wearing that outfit in front of people?

Koutarou felt something was odd with Kiriha today.

For starters, he didn't understand the reason why Kiriha was helping clean the city. He couldn't think of a reason she had to; after all, she was an invader.

On top of that, her outfit was another problem. Normally, when Kiriha went outside, she would wear her high school uniform or some fashionable clothing from the surface. That was in order to blend in, but for some reason, she wasn't disguising herself today. She was wearing her native outfit and announcing her presence.

“Look, Satomi-kun, there are other people wearing the same outfit as Kiriha.”

At that moment, several girls exited the city hall. Although the specific details were different, they were indeed wearing similar outfits to Kiriha.

They grouped up with Kiriha and began talking about something before joining up with the neighborhood association to help carry the garbage bags.

“Which means, they're all Kiriha-san's allies?”

Seeing them together like that, Koutarou assumed they were all allies, but his words made Sanae's face turn pale.

“This is bad, Koutarou! If they're Kiriha's allies, they're all from the underground, right!? They're here to invade the surface!”

Kiriha's goal was to invade the surface, she said so herself. And now that her allies had appeared, it must mean their goal to invade the surface was starting. Sanae panicked at that thought.

“Hmmmmm....”

However, that line of thinking didn't seem right to Koutarou. He tilted his head as he looked at Kiriha and her allies.

“What's wrong, Koutarou!? If we don't hurry and do something about them, our home and this city will be in danger!”

Irritated by Koutarou, Sanae pointed her finger at Kiriha and the others and repeated herself. But Koutarou kept tilting his head.

“Is that really so...?”

“What are you hesitating for!?”

“Now, now, just calm down Sanae.”

“As if I could calm down in this situation!? The invasion has already begun!”

“...I don't think it's started though.”

Koutarou remained calm because he didn't think the surface invasion had begun.

“That can't be it! They're definitely invading!”

“But, Kiriha-san and the others are only cleaning, you know?”

That was the primary reason for Koutarou to assume they weren't invading. No matter how you cut it, Kiriha and her allies were volunteers, helping to clean the city. The only special thing about them was their outfits, and they were working in harmony with the neighborhood association.

“They're only trying to make it look like they're cleaning, behind the scenes they're definitely—”

Sanae was still persistent, but...

“Definitely—”

...even to Sanae it looked like they were only cleaning. Her voice dropped and she stopped mid-sentence. Not even Sanae could believe that filling bags with garbage was for the sake of invading the surface.

“Hm?”

“Yeah... Hey Koutarou.”

“Yeah?”

“Why are they cleaning?”

“I don't know either.”

“Really... why are they cleaning...”

He knew that it wasn't to invade the surface, but even then, Koutarou didn't know why they were helping clean the city.

Part 2

That night, after breakfast...

Koutarou would feel too anxious to leave his question unanswered, so he decided to flat out ask Kiriha.

“Fufun, you're ten years too young to try and beat me!”

“Curse youuuu, in that case, Yurika, let's combine!”

“No way! I'd rather lose than be possessed!”

“You wimp!”

Fortunately, Yurika, Theia and Sanae were glued to the TV playing games, leaving only Kiriha and Ruth by the tea table. With the three noisy ones occupied, this was his chance.

Ruth put down three cups and began pouring tea. While listening to that sound, Koutarou mentioned the topic on his mind. He didn't think it was that much of a deal, so he sensed no danger and asked in a casual tone of voice.

“Kiriha-san.”

“What, Koutarou?”

“On our way back from tennis we saw you and some other girls. You were cleaning by the city hall, right?”

“If you were looking you could have just come up and said something.”

Kiriha didn't deny it; instead, she smiled at Koutarou.

Ruth put down the tea cups in front of Koutarou and Kiriha. After saying her thanks, Kiriha picked up her cup. Koutarou picked up his own cup and continued talking.

“I'll do that next time. So, Kiriha-san, why did you volunteer to help clean?”

“Does it bother you?”

Kiriha smiled as she said that and placed her lips on the cup. After that, Kiriha suddenly looked at Ruth with surprise.

“Ruth, this isn't the tea we usually get. What's happened?”

“Actually, when I went shopping yesterday, I got this as a trial.”

“You mean that teahouse... hmm, let's get this from now on.”

As Kiriha stared at the tea cup in her hand with a delighted expression, Koutarou's doubt began growing.

Does Kiriha-san really intend to invade the surface?

Koutarou couldn't imagine the cleaning or the tea topic being words from an invader.

“Well yeah, it bothers me. You're from the underground but you're bringing your allies up to clean the city. Anyone would wonder the same thing.”

“Fufufu, now that you mention it, that might be the case.”

Kiriha smiled lightly and tilted her head.

“Lately, I've almost been forgetting that I'm an invader.”

Koutarou found that feminine gesture preferable.

“Then forget I said anything.”

“I can't do that. Actually, Koutarou. That cleaning is part of our invasion.”

“W-What!?”

With those unexpected words leaving Kiriha's gently smiling lips, Koutarou instinctively spat out the tea in his mouth.

“Oh my!”

Ruth also looked on in surprise. She was also unable to hide her surprise.

“You're kidding, right!? What would cleaning have to do with invading!?”

Right now, Koutarou felt both surprise and disappointment.

That's weird. Why am I disappointed...?

While Koutarou still doubted Kiriha, he was puzzled by the fact that he was disappointed that her invasion had begun, even though he knew from the start that Kiriha's goal was to invade the surface.

“Could it be that you're only pretending to be cleaning so you could poison

the water supply!?”

“Of course not. That's undoubtedly cleaning.”

“Eh?”

Koutarou was confused, his mouth was wide open. Kiriha could easily tell that he was dumbfounded.

“Fufufu, look at your own expression, Koutarou. Is it really that strange that I would volunteer to clean the city?”

Kiriha cheerfully laughed as she looked at Koutarou's confused expression and revealed a healthy, feminine smile.

“Ah, no, that's not it... I just can't connect invasion and volunteering.”

“Well, they are connected, Koutarou. Actually, that kind of thing is the most important.”

As Kiriha wiped away a tear of joy from her eye, she began explaining to Koutarou.

“You can't just use violence and force your way when you invade.”

“You can't?”

Koutarou was confused. In his head, invasion was done through the use of powerful weapons.

“In fiction, they certainly use force. But reality is different. Even if you rule through power, the natives will eventually revolt.”

“...If I'm not mistaken, several decades ago a country called Germany began several invasions, but the countries that had been invaded still had very active resistances, right?”

Ruth, who had kept quiet up until this point, spoke up. Eight months had now passed since she first arrived at Earth. Thanks to that, she had begun to get a grasp of Earth's history.

“That's correct. They were unable to earn the support of the people they had invaded, and those people eventually rebelled. The result of which, need not be said.”

In the end, the resistance cooperated with the allied forces and regained their freedom by repelling the German army. The moral of the story is that if you try to rule through force, resistance will be born.

“So there's a limit to how long you can control things through power alone.”

“Yes. Especially for the minority like ourselves, it won't be easy to maintain rule through power. That method won't work.”

“So that's why you were helping clean the city?”

“That's right. If we don't become familiar with the locals and get close, we'll never be able to invade, in the true meaning of the word. We have nothing to fall back on so we have to succeed.”

The People of the Earth were unable to stop their decline in population. Because of that, they planned to appear on the surface and spread their influence. Kiriha was proceeding with the safest way of invasion.

“What we fear the most is that you surface dwellers will label us as a dangerous group, like terrorists or guerillas. If that happens, the invasion will get prolonged, and we will be ruined underground. That would be bad.”

Once labeled as a terrorist or guerrilla group, it would take several decades to rid themselves of that reputation. During those several decades, the People of the Earth would only decline even further. In that case, spending a little more time to build a harmonious relationship with the surface dwellers would be better.

“Hmm, so there are several kinds of invasions...”

“We've examined the history on the surface up until now, so we've had a lot to think of.”

In reality, anti-government guerillas that create hospitals, schools or wells for the populace are extremely troublesome. Because the locals cover them, they are near impossible to completely wipe out.

Taking that into account, Kiriha decided against the use of force and instead focused on getting along with the locals. The volunteer job from before was the first step for that.

“Well, that's troublesome.”

Having understood everything, Koutarou let out a heavy sigh. Even though he had gotten a solid understanding of the situation he was still perplexed.

“What's so troublesome?”

Kiriha cheerfully smiled. She already knew what Koutarou was thinking about.

“Even though your invasion has already begun, I can't stop you. You're not doing anything bad after all.”

“Koutarou, that's what a true invasion is. If you could tell it was an invasion from first glance, that would just be simple child’s play.”

As Kiriha said that, she filled her mouth with the tea from her cup. She nodded approvingly as she presented the cup to Ruth.

“Ruth. Excuse me, but may I have another cup?”

“Yes, right away.”

Ruth began preparing another cup of tea right away. While looking at Ruth, Koutarou thought to himself.

If Kiriha told me to hand over the room now, what would I say?

Eight months ago, Koutarou completely refused her demands.

But what if she had done the same now?

Koutarou didn't have the confidence that he could refuse as confidently as he

did back then.

Part 3

Below Corona House was a secret base that Kiriha had built. If you flipped over the tatami mat closest to the entrance of the room, you would find a tunnel leading towards it.

The tunnel had been completely paved with concrete, and there was no soil in sight. There were lights at regular intervals, illuminating the tunnel. It was so well made it could be confused with an underground shopping center.

Kiriha was passing through that tunnel, heading for her secret base. It was now almost midnight. She planned on returning to her room and going to bed.

The sound of Kiriha's shoes echoed throughout the tunnel, creating a jarring noise. The biggest flaw of the tunnel would be the sounds of her footsteps.

The length of the tunnel was roughly 50 meters. After turning a couple of corners and climbing down two sets of stairs, she had arrived at the entrance of her base, a metallic door.

Kiriha opened the door in an accustomed manner and entered.

Inside was a clean and orderly room. It was roughly three times the size of Koutarou's room. Inside were three doors: one led to room 106, another led to Kiriha's underground hometown and the last door led to her private room. The other things in this room included a device used for maintenance on her haniwas, a weapons depot and several computers.

Once Kiriha entered the room, the haniwas headed for the maintenance device right away.

“Ho-! Good night Ho-!”

“HoHo-! See you tomorrow, nee-san!”

Amongst the things inside the room, the maintenance device was the largest.

Although it was used for maintenance on the two small haniwas, it was also large enough to allow freedom of movement inside. The haniwas didn't just enter the device to go sleep, but it also served as a repair station. The haniwas pressed a switch to open a hatch and entered the device.

“Good night, Karama, Korama.”

After watching the tempered glass hatch shut, Kiriha headed towards the computers. On her way, she passed by the weapons depot.

The weapons depot held different armaments for Kiriha and various attachments for the haniwas. The last time Kiriha had opened the depot was when she had fought against Theia. In order to break through Theia's powerful shield, she had to equip the haniwas with spiritual energy weaponry. However, after that incident, she had never opened the depot since. She hadn't even touched the weapons intended for her. Although she looked like she was the most set on invasion, in reality, she was the most peaceful amongst the residents of room 106, possibly even more so than Koutarou.

Because of that, she passed by the weapons depot without even looking at it.

Apart from monitoring the base and controlling the maintenance device, the computers could be used to communicate with her hometown and more. Before going to sleep, she was going to confirm that there were no irregularities.

“Hmm, a message.”

As she took a look at the monitor, Kiriha saw a message notification. She touched the notification and opened up the message.

“From the Chief, huh.”

The Chief wasn't just her boss, but also her father. Ever since she had been selected as the commander for the surface invasion, she had started calling him Chief.

Kiriha read through the message. In it said to contact him directly and give him a status report.

“Fufu...”

Kiriha revealed a small smile. Whenever her father wanted to see his daughter's face, he would leave a message like this. Ever since Kiriha's mother passed away ten years ago, her father had raised her on his own. Because of that, Kiriha knew that he was worrying about her. She smiled and opened up a program on the computer and called him.

“Kiriha!?”

The ringtone only lasted for a few seconds before a middle aged man's face appeared on the screen. Although he was wearing a beard and had a dignified appearance, his eyes shone like that of a child’s. He was Kiriha's father, and the chief of the clan: Kurano Daiha.

“It has been a while, Chief.”

Kiriha revealed a mischievous and happy smile, one that she rarely showed to the residents of room 106.

Judging from how short the wait was, Kiriha determined that he had been waiting for her call.

“Again with the Chief... you can just call me father. It's just the two of us talking after all.”

“However, the message was to deliver a status report. This isn't a private conversation.”

Kiriha continued while withholding her laughter. Her expression was something she would only show to someone she truly trusted. Seeing that, Daiha frowned exaggeratedly.

“Lately you've started to not only look like her, but also act like her. Even the parts you don't need to. You know what I mean, you bully...”

“Then let's get our business over with.”

“Alright, alright.”

Daiha stopped acting like a child, corrected his posture and put on a serious expression. His glance was sharp and gave off the impression of a man with a strong will. That was the expression of a Chief. Following suit, Kiriha put on a serious expression. From here on they weren't family, but Chief and subordinate.

“So, what's your status?”

“Plan A is progressing smoothly, and stage one is complete. We've begun on stage two. We're building up our trust with the surface dwellers.”

Kiriha had come up with two major plans for a surface invasion, plan A and plan B. Plan B involved Kiriha overseeing the problematic room 106 directly. And plan A was being carried on separate from that.

Plan A had been divided up into several stages.

The first stage was securing a base. In order for the underground people to get up to the surface, they needed to secure a place of dwelling. Selling off the rare metal Kiriha and the others were hoarding, they had bought up a lot of real estates in the city. And since they reached their target amount the other day, they had begun on stage two.

The second stage was getting along with the surface dwellers. Kiriha and the others had begun participating in events and volunteered to help the city. They were showing off that they were good neighbors. This was the trickiest part of Kiriha's plan; a single misstep could risk the entire plan. So they proceeded carefully. That's what Kiriha had been doing when Koutarou and the others had found her cleaning.

“And what response have the surface dwellers given?”

“Great, for the most part. The people that found employment in the local

industries seem to have had a large influence.”

Infiltration of local industries was part of the second stage for plan A. There were plenty of people that had found employment within agriculture, fishing, welfare and the likes. Once they had infiltrated those industries and become a key part of it, they would at least be able to avoid ruin should something unexpected happen.

“I see, so it's progressing smoothly.”

“Yes. At this rate, we'll be able to spread our influence through this entire city within ten years.”

Next, they were planning to advance up the social hierarchy of political and financial circles. If they didn't secure a foothold within those circles, they would have trouble acquiring any real power. They needed to integrate into the region even more. However, Kiriha wasn't pessimistic; the response to them was gradually changing. If nothing major happened, the People of the Earth would be able to survive on the surface. That's what Kiriha had begun feeling as of late.

“And what about plan B?”

“That's proceeding smoothly as well- or that's what I'd like to say. But the situation is going back and forth as usual.”

“It seems to be a complex situation.”

“Yes. Apart from us, there are several other factions targeting that place.”

Plan B was about occupying Corona House's room 106.

If they were able to gain control of room 106, they would be able to rebuild their ancestors’ altar. Since the altar also served as an efficient place to gather spiritual energy, they would be able to mass produce spiritual energy weapons like Karama and Korama.

“That said, with plan A proceeding smoothly, I don't believe there is any

reason to worry about the delays in plan B.”

In the end, plan B was just an insurance. It was only intended to be used if the peaceful integration of plan A failed, that is, in case the army on the surface attacked them. Because of that, since plan A was proceeding without a hitch, there was no need to rush plan B. Instead, rushing along with plan A might only cause more damage.

“I am of the same opinion. However, Kiriha, the radical faction has begun moving lately.”

“As we feared, they're making their move then?”

“Yes.”

Daiha nodded with a frown.

The People of the Earth were not united as one. There were several clans that held power, but they not were completely unified. Amongst the clans were those that wished to use force to invade the surface swiftly, a radical faction. To them, Kiriha's methods were too naïve.

“If we can't hold them back, we might need to abandon plan A. In that case—”

“Plan B would be a necessity.”

“That's right. We'll try to restrain the radical faction’s movement from here, but you should keep an eye out as well. There might be those that would target you directly.”

“I understand.”

While Kiriha nodded at Daiha, she understood why he wanted her to contact him with this timing. He didn't just want to see his daughter's face but he was also worried about her safety.

In the worst case scenario, I might need to defeat those people...

The faces of the residents of room 106 popped up in Kiriha's head. Sanae, Theia, Ruth, Yurika and Koutarou. If the radical faction caused a scene, they would need to reconstruct the altar as soon as possible. With their inferior numbers, they would need a large amount of spiritual energy weapons or they would face ruin. Because of that, there might arise the need to defeat and dispose of Koutarou and the others.

But could I do that...?

They had spent a lot of precious time together during these past eight months, and that troubled Kiriha. She couldn't imagine pointing a weapon at Koutarou and the others.

“Hey, Kiriha.”

At this moment, Daiha's expression loosened up. It wasn't the expression of a Chief, but of a caring father.

“Father?”

Sensing that, Kiriha returned to herself.

“Won't you come back and take a groom?”

“A groom... Are you telling me to get married?”

“Yes. If you do that, our support will strengthen and the influence of the radicals will wane. You'll be safe and you won't have to fight against opponents you don't want to fight with.”

Daiha's idea was simple. He wanted to restrain the radical faction through a political marriage.

It didn't matter if she married someone from the radical faction or any other influential person. If Kiriha's influence grew, the radicals would lose their power.

But in the end that was just a front. Front and foremost, Daiha didn't want his daughter in any danger.

“...I can't.”

However, despite understanding all of that, Kiriha shook her head.

“You've become as stubborn as your mother as well.”

“That's not... but father, if I leave the surface now, I won't be able to restrain the radical faction. We need to avoid that no matter what.”

Even if she were to take a groom, it wouldn't resolve the situation right away. They would need to lay down the groundwork and adjust the schedule, even more so because it would be a political marriage. During that time, the radical faction might make a move while Kiriha was away. There would be no point in marrying if the radical faction caused a scene before the marriage.

“Hmm... even if you were to marry, if we can't stop the radical faction...”

“That's right.”

Seeing Daiha's response, Kiriha let out a small sigh of relief. She took out a single card from her pocket. It was an aging card with a metallic sheen.

Kiriha had one more reason for why she couldn't get married.

And that was this card. Before she could accomplish the desires this card held, she didn't have the option of getting married.

Part 4

Dawn, 7AM. The Sunday morning in room 106 starts, as expected, with Ruth.

Although the days started later in the winter, at 7AM the sun began shining into room 106. However, even with that, it wasn't enough to warm up the room, and it was cold enough for Ruth to see her breath as she entered the room.

“Satomi-sama is...”

The first thing Ruth did was search the room for Koutarou. Since his sleeping

habits were so poor, he would often lie next to the gate leading to the Blue Knight, and Ruth and Theia would then step on him as they entered the room.

“Ah, good, he's sleeping over there.”

She only put her head through the gate to look for Koutarou. After confirming his location, she stepped out of the gate, careful to not make a sound. Although not even loud sounds would wake up Koutarou, the proper Ruth valued manners highly.

“If you sleep in a place like that you'll catch a cold, Satomi-sama...”

Koutarou always laid out his futon in the center of the room, but right now he was sleeping in front of the wardrobe. Of course he had no quilt and was lying on his back in his pajamas.

Ruth's second job was to put a quilt over Koutarou.

“Hi—”

However, Ruth almost let out a scream.

“...I'll never get used to seeing this...”

Holding her scream in, Ruth smiled wryly as she covered him from chest and down.

“Zzzzz...”

Sanae's blissful looking sleeping face was sticking out of Koutarou's chest. It was almost as if Koutarou's pajamas had an image of Sanae printed on them, but it was in fact the real Sanae, wearing a nightcap. She was sleeping inside of Koutarou's body. It was this scene that almost made Ruth scream.

“ZZZzzz... ZZZzzz...”

“Zzzzz...”

Koutarou and Sanae's snores rang out in a strange harmony.

Lately, Sanae had been complaining about feeling cold, and often slept inside

of Koutarou. Apparently, the inside of Koutarou's body was comfortable to sleep in. And ever since she first tried it, it had become her favorite sleeping spot.

Although Sanae liked it, her new sleeping spot was unpopular with the others. The only thing sticking out from Koutarou's body was her face, and her limbs would fall out every now and then. It was an appalling sight that made it look like Koutarou had grown female limbs. Koutarou himself would often be surprised and would complain to Sanae. Of course, Sanae showed no signs of listening to his complaints, and whenever she saw an opening she would enter his body to sleep.

“Today's better than normal, but this is bad for my heart...”

Having finished putting a quilt over Koutarou and Sanae, Ruth smiled wryly and headed towards the kitchen.

Normally, shortly after Ruth arrived, Kiriha would appear and the two of them would prepare breakfast together. However, for some reason, she showed no signs of showing up today. Ruth ended up preparing breakfast on her own.

“Hmm... So you made breakfast alone today? It looks delicious.”

“Thank you very much, Sanae-sama.”

Receiving praise, Ruth smiled and put down the breakfast on the tea table. Rice, miso soup, broiled fish and natto, they were Sanae and Koutarou's favorites.

“That said, Sanae, get out from there.”

“No wa~y♪”

Even though it was time for breakfast, Sanae refused to leave Koutarou's body. She cheerfully laughed with her face sticking through Koutarou's chest.

“You now...”

“If you really hate it then chase me out. Come on, try it.”

Sanae reached her arm out from Koutarou's body and poked his face.

Sanae was able to enter Koutarou's body after the two of them started getting along. So if he really hated it, she wouldn't be able to stay inside of his body. Knowing that, Sanae was stubborn.

Hehehe, Koutarou loves me after all!

If Koutarou accepted her, then she would go all out. Sanae's actions were an expression of her love.

“That's right, Sanae. Can't you at least stop it during breakfast? Seeing you like that makes me lose my appetite.”

“Sanae-chan, at least give us a break with the supernatural phenomenon in the morning.”

However, Sanae's expression of love was also unpopular with Theia and Yurika. The sight of someone's face sticking out from someone else's body wasn't very appetizing.

“That's right, Sanae. Do you want me to feel sick while eating?”

“Ugh, that would be a problem.”

It wasn't enough for Koutarou to chase Sanae out, but this sight was enough to remove any urge to eat.

And since Sanae always shared her senses with Koutarou, having him eating while feeling sick wouldn't be very fun for her.

“So come out.”

“Okaaay.”

Sanae reluctantly came out from Koutarou's body. She easily left his body and in a matter of seconds, she appeared behind his back.

“Sorry for making a fuss during breakfast.”

Saying that, Sanae clung onto Koutarou's back, like she normally did during

meals.

Sleeping aside, I think I prefer this normally...

That's what Sanae thought as she clung onto Koutarou. It was comfortable enough inside of Koutarou, but if she stayed there, she couldn't do anything for him. She would rather stick onto Koutarou and mess around with him.

After Sanae got onto Koutarou's back, Yurika's stomach began growling. With the supernatural phenomenon behind them, her appetite had returned.

“You really are easy going, Yurika...”

Hearing that, Koutarou pointed at Yurika and laughed.

“T-That's because it's morning, I'm hungry... it can't be helped!”

Yurika blushed and desperately made excuses.

“You're just a glutton.”

“I-It's true that it can't be helped but, you... buhahaha.”

“S-Sorry for you keeping you waiting, Yurika-sama.”

Stifling her laughter, Ruth put down breakfast in front of Yurika. However, despite the food in front of her, Yurika was pouting.

“You're all terrible, treating me like some starved animal.”

“W-Well, you know. If you're hungry, eat. You can take as many extra helpings you'd like today.”

“Really!?”

Hearing Koutarou's words, Yurika's eyes lit up. Her pouting expression immediately changed into a smile.

“Buhahahaha.”

“See, she's just gluttonous.”

“Y-Yurika-sama, w-would you like a large portion?”

Koutarou laughed loudly, Sanae grinned behind him and Ruth stopped moving her hands as she tried to hold her laughter in. The wooden spoon in her hand trembled slightly.

“T-There's no reason to laugh that much! I'm not gluttonous, I'm just in my growing phase!”

Yurika had tears in her eyes as she desperately made excuses. Room 106 was as noisy as always.

“...”

Watching that commotion in the corner of her eye, Theia continued eating her breakfast. In the eight months that had passed since she first came to Earth, she had gotten skilled at using chopsticks. She gracefully moved her chopsticks and put the food in her mouth.

“T-Then there's no need to hold back, grow all you like! Wahahaha!”

“Ah, that expression tells me you don't believe me!”

“Koutarou, I'm in my growing phase too, I want to eat.”

“R-Ruth-san, I'm in my growing phase as well, give me an extra large portion.”

“Of course, right away. Fufufu...”

However, Theia couldn't tell what the breakfast tasted like. Ever since Sanae had clung onto Koutarou's back, she had been focused solely on them.

I wish...

Theia imagined herself clinging onto Koutarou's back. In that fantasy, she was smiling cheerfully while entrusting her defenseless body to Koutarou. The moment she thought of that, Theia was overcome with feelings of impatience.

J-Just what I am thinking...?

She returned to her senses and looked down. She couldn't believe she had been thinking about doing the same thing Sanae was doing.

He's just a vassal! I only need him to swear loyalty for my trial! No more, no less!

Ever since the second princess's, Clan's, attack, Theia's feelings had begun changing.

When she first arrived on Earth, she only thought of Koutarou as some neanderthal on a backwater planet. She just wanted him to swear his loyalty so she could hurry on back to Forthorthe.

However, as time passed, she began wanting to make Koutarou a true vassal. Because of that, she began smiling at him.

But now, Koutarou was beginning to exceed the role of a vassal in her mind. Even if he wasn't her vassal, he would definitely come to her side when needed. She was certain of that. But that's why she was confused. She no longer knew what she wanted from Koutarou.

Theia only returned to the world when one of the tatami mats suddenly began moving. Just where she had been looking, a tatami mat slowly rose up, and a person appeared.

“Good morning.”

Coming out from under the tatami was none other than Kiriha, Theia just happened to be looking at the tatami that led to Kiriha's secret base.

“Good morning... That said, you're awfully late today.”

Theia's line of thinking stopped alongside the appearance of Kiriha, and she called out to her in a small voice.

“Actually, I've been working since this morning.”

Kiriha flipped over the mat and entered room 106 with a light step. Shortly after, the two haniwas appeared from behind her.

“Ho-! Good morning Ho-!”

“How is everyone doing Ho-!”

The haniwas cheerfully greeted everyone as they returned the tatami mat to its former spot. Since they did the same thing every morning, they had gotten quite used to this.

“Good morning, Kiriha-san.”

Noticing Kiriha's presence, Koutarou greeted her. After she had greeted everyone, she sat down by the open space in front of the tea table.

“Ruth, sorry for being late.”

“Not at all. It was a good opportunity to try out my cooking skills.”

“But why were you late today? You didn't oversleep did you?”

If Yurika had been the one late, Sanae wouldn't have asked the same question. However, since this was Kiriha, who had never once overslept, Sanae wasn't the only one interested. In fact, everyone except Yurika stopped eating and looked at Kiriha.

“Actually, there was some trouble in my hometown, so I spent the morning dealing with that.”

Kiriha had been late because she was formulating countermeasures for the radical faction she was talking with her father about. There was a lot for her to do, like contacting the surface branch and giving orders to her direct subordinates.

“By hometown, you mean the underground empire, right?”

“Calling it an empire would be misleading... but yes, that's correct.”

While receiving a teacup from Ruth, Kiriha nodded at Koutarou.

“By trouble, did something bad happen?”

Even if he asked for details, Koutarou probably wouldn't understand, and

Kiriha probably wouldn't tell anyways. So Koutarou asked a vague question. When he did, Kiriha responded with a smile.

“Would you like to know?”

“Well, yes. If it's trouble regarding the underground empire, I'm not completely unrelated.”

Koutarou nodded repeatedly and slightly dropped his shoulders.

She seems a bit down...

That's what Koutarou felt as he was talking to Kiriha. It looked to him like she was feeling tired.

“I do think it's unrelated to you however.”

“Kiriha-san, did you forget that you're a part of the underground people?”

“Ah, that's right.”

Kiriha smiled.

That's right. I'm one of the People of the Earth, and I'm trying to take this room from Koutarou...

Kiriha had been frantically trying to stop the radical faction from moving, so much so that she had partly forgotten that she was an invader. So it was just as Koutarou said, trouble in the underground empire could affect Koutarou as well.

“There's no need to worry, Koutarou. Nothing will happen.”

“Then that's good.”

Kiriha smiled, but Koutarou felt it was different from normal. Her usual smile was more mischievous than that.

I wonder what's going on...

In truth, Koutarou wasn't all that worried about the underground empire. He

was more worried about Kiriha’s somewhat gloomy expression.

I just hope nothing bad is happening...

Finding it strange that he was worrying about Kiriha, Koutarou couldn't just leave her be.

For several days, Kiriha seemed very busy.

She would often not show up for breakfast, and sometimes she wouldn't even go to school. Since she wouldn’t explain the situation, Koutarou could only watch on from the sidelines.

Muffler and Part-Time Job

Part 1

Thursday, December 10

That day, Koutarou was awakened by the familiar sound of a kitchen knife against a cutting board, and the fragrance of miso soup.

If I'm not mistaken, this is...

When Koutarou opened his eyes, a window was in front of him. He had grabbed hold of his pillow and rolled in front of the window.

“Kiriha-sama, it seems we've run out of natto.”

“I understand. I'll buy some later, on my way back.”

Koutarou could hear Ruth and Kiriha's voices coming from the kitchen, the kitchen knife and miso soup came from those two.

I see, it's Kiriha-san...

When he turned his head around, he could see the two girls. These past few days, Ruth had been preparing breakfast on her own. Kiriha had only been absent for a week, but he was for some reason relieved.

“By the way, I finished copying the notes you took while I was away. I'll return them to you later. Thank you.”

“There's no need for thanks, Kiriha-sama.”

Seems like that trouble is over...

Kiriha was just standing in the kitchen, but that's how Koutarou interpreted it. She was where she had always been, that alone was enough for him.

“Koutarou... breakfast already...?”

At that moment, Sanae appeared in front of Koutarou. She was still sleepy and rubbed her eyes.

“No, not yet. You can sleep a bit more.”

“Mm...”

Sanae spread her hands and sunk into Koutarou's body. However just before she completely vanished, she whispered.

“Koutarou...”

“Yeah?”

“Could you keep that mood up for a while? It feels so comfortable...”

“...Yeah, I'll try.”

“Mm...”

After that, Sanae sank into Koutarou's body, as if she was melting away.

I see, warm and comfortable...

When Sanae said that, Koutarou realized he was welcoming the normal Kiriha back.

Part 2

Yurika was surprisingly sensitive and had a hard time falling asleep. Having allowed a cockroach to invade the wardrobe had left her traumatized.

However once she had fallen asleep, she wouldn't wake up easily. She would keep on sleeping as everyone else headed for school.

She had a hard time falling asleep, and a hard time waking up.

To her roommates, she was the troublesome type.

“Zzzzz... Zzzzz... Zzzzz...”

“What to do...”

Koutarou showed a bitter expression as he confronted Yurika, sleeping with her mouth wide open. He was going to wake her up for breakfast, but no matter how much he shook or poked her, she showed no signs of waking up.

“Why don't you just leave her be? She's sleeping because she wants to.”

“No can do. She been late to school enough as it is. At this rate, she'll be have to repeat a year.”

Up until now Koutarou had ignored Yurika's tardiness, but after hearing from the teacher that she might be forced to repeat a year, he had made it a habit to wake her up before school.

“I guess it can't be helped... So how are you going to wake her up this time, Koutarou? Are you going to slap her again?”

“Hmm...”

Koutarou began thinking.

So far, he had literally slapped her awake, but Yurika had complained and forbade him from waking her up with violence. She cried, telling him that he'd need to marry her if her face ended up distorted, which caused Koutarou to back down.

“However, if hitting her is out the question, I have no way of waking her up.”

“I think so too.”

“Zzzzz... Zzzz... Zzzz...”

Unaware of Koutarou's plight, Yurika kept care freely sleeping while curled up. Then, Theia who was peeking inside the wardrobe next to Koutarou poked his face with a fan.

“Koutarou, at least now you understand just how hard it is for us to wake you up in the morning.”

“Shut up, Theia!! You have no problem stepping on me with your heels!!”

“Obviously! If I don't, you'd never wake up! Besides, a knight being woken up by a princess is unheard of! You'd be better of thanking me!!”

“Who are you calling a knight!?”

“With this loud of an argument next to someone, they'd normally wake up...”

“Haa~h, I-I can't eat anymore.... Zzzz... Zzzz...”

Yurika was unfazed, despite Koutarou and Theia's arguing. She kept sleeping with a happy look on her face.

“So what are you going to do, Koutarou.”

“Zzzz... Zzzz... I-I'm so full, it feels painful...”

“Painful, right... that's it!!”

Having come up with an idea, Koutarou reached his hand out towards Yurika.

“What are you going to do?”

“Just wait and see.”

Sanae looked on in confusion as Koutarou touched Yurika's face. Of course, just having her face touched didn't faze her either.

“You do this.”

“Ugh.”

Koutarou used his left hand to block her nose, and his right to close her mouth.

“Good plan! This might just work!”

“I don't think this is that much different from being stepped on by high heels though...”

“Mhm, mmmh, mhhmmmmm!”

Unable to breathe, Yurika began struggling for air. Her expression turned into one of pain, and her face was starting to turn blue. But even then, Yurika wasn't waking up.

“She's not waking up...”

“Wake up Yurika! You'll be late!”

“At this rate, she'll literally never wake up.”

After keeping that up for several tens of seconds-

“Hmmmh!?”

Yurika's eyes open wide, and at the same time her arms and legs began swinging.

“Mmmmmmm~mmmmm!! Mmmhhmhmm!!”

“Woah, don't swing your arms around like that, hurry and wake up Yurika, you'll be late!”

“Mmmmm!!”

“Koutarou. Could it be that she's already awake?”

“You think? Are you sure? If she was awake, she'd say something.”

“Let's keep it up a while longer, just in case.”

“Mmmmm!! Mhmmm~~mmmm!!”

After this event, choking was also banned when waking Yurika up.

Part 3

“Besides, Satomi-san, you have no sympathy!”

“I'm sorry. I didn't think you couldn't speak because your mouth was blocked.”

“Can't you please notice that right away!?”

Yurika slammed her fists down on her desk. Normally, she was timid and gentle, but with her life at stake she couldn't help but get worked up. Yurika's angry voice echoed out through the classroom, and a lot of their classmates wondered what was going on as they stared at Koutarou and Yurika.

“Then wake up more easily.”

“Can't you just find any other way!?”

“I can't, that's why I did that. Or would you rather be late?”

“Ugh.”

That's when Yurika's protests stopped. She wasn't sure if she'd rather be late or be unable to breathe.

“If you miss more classes, you might have to repeat a year, right?”

“Ughhh.”

T-That's unfair, Satomi-san is unfair!

Yurika understood that Koutarou was worried about her.

He couldn’t remember but, in the past, Koutarou had said he wanted to graduate alongside Yurika. He wasn't lying when he said that.

That's why she knew that Koutarou was without a doubt, worried about her. The only problem was that his methods were unreasonable.

“Satomi-san, no matter how worried about me you are, there are some things you just can't do! That was just too much!”

Recently, the feelings that Yurika threw at Koutarou had begun changing. In the past she would voice complaints and be selfish, but now there was a different feeling mixed in.

Satomi-san you really aren't being honest! Even though you're more kind than anyone else!

She was dissatisfied by Koutarou always hiding his true feelings.

“I'm sorry, I'm sorry.”

“I'm not saying you should apologize! I just want you to be more honest!”

Koutarou and Yurika's loud argument continued. Watching the two from afar, Kenji asked Shizuka who happened to be near him.

“Kasagi-san, what'd Kou do this time?”

“Well, you see. Satomi-kun and the others were worried about Yurika's tardiness, and Satomi-kun blocked her mouth and nose in order to wake her up...”

Shizuka neglected to mention that Koutarou and Yurika lived in the same apartment and bent the truth slightly.

Thinking about it, it's strange that nothing obscene has happened... Well, I guess that's just like Satomi-kun...

Shizuka looked at the two arguing and smiled.

“He really doesn't change, does he...”

Having understood the situation, Kenji recalled the school trip back in junior high school. There, Koutarou woke up in the middle of the night and played pranks on his classmates.

Apart from choking his classmates, he would draw on their faces or strip them. In the end he'd roll around the room, eventually causing a large-scale war.

“Then how am I supposed to wake you up?”

“Ugh.”

“I can't hit you, I can't choke you, all that's left is pour a bucket of ice cold water over you.”

“Wouldn't boiling water work? Kiriha and Ruth boil water when they're making breakfast anyways, we could just use that.”

“At least let it be ice cold water! Anything but boiling water!”

“You sure are picky, geez...”

Koutarou looked at Yurika with an unpleasant expression, she had begun crying.

“Satomi-kun, Nijino-san.”

Putting down the cell phone in her pocket, Kiriha approached the two.

“There's something I'd like to ask you to do.”

“I don't mind.”

“W-What is it?”

Seeing his chance, Koutarou jumped at Kiriha's offer. Meanwhile, Yurika rubbed her eyes to hide her tears from Kiriha.

“Actually, on Sunday, two days from now I was wondering if you could help me with a part-time job.”

“A part-time job?”

Kiriha's offer was, unexpectedly, a part-time job.

The youth department of the neighborhood association were planning a hero show, starring the local heroes Harukaze-man and Kishou-lady. The show was one of the events they were holding for the anniversary of the Harukaze preschool. However, lots of people were required for them to hold a hero show. There were lots of things to do, such as creating the stage, outfits and props, managers and more. Because of that, the youth department alone weren't enough, so they were looking for volunteers.

That led them to Kiriha, who had been actively helping the community as of late. The youth department ended up asking Kiriha for help. They had heard that Kiriha had participated in a play during the culture festival so to them, she was a godsend. And since Kiriha wanted to integrate into the society, she happily accepted their offer.

However, since there were only two days, Kiriha couldn't gather enough of the underground people stationed on the surface, and asked Koutarou and the others for help.

“So you're telling us to appear at a hero show?”

“Yes. I've asked my acquaintances, but most of them have no stage

experience... In that respect, you and the others have some experience from the culture festival...”

Kiriha had an apologetic look on her face. She felt sorry for springing something so sudden on them.

“I see. Yurika in particular acts like she's living inside of a hero show; she's perfect for the job.”

Shizuka agreed and nodded repeatedly.

Before Koutarou had realized, the usual group had gathered around him.

On top of Sanae, Yurika and Kiriha, Theia, Ruth, Shizuka and Kenji appeared. They all listened to what Kiriha had to say.

“Alright, I understand! Kiriha, just leave it to us!”

Theia's eyes lit up and she pounded her chest. Although it might have been a hero show for kids, a play is a play. It was the perfect chance for her to train Koutarou some more.

“I and Koutarou will leave those children speechless with our magnificent acting!”

“J-Just wait a moment, Theia, you're joining in to!?”

“Rejoice, Koutarou. We'll be having some special training tonight!”

Theia's eyes sparkled as she looked at Koutarou. Seeing that, he remembered his hardships from the culture festival.

“Special training!? Do I have to relive that nightmare again!?”

He would wake up to Theia's face every morning. With only the toilet as his sanctuary, his life was controlled entirely by Theia. Not allowed to even rest for a moment, he would spend the entire day being hounded by Theia's shouts, until he passed his limits and passed out. Theia stayed with him from

the moment he awoke to the moment he passed out. Theia's special training was so harsh, it made even the athletic Koutarou think of it as a nightmare come true.

“There's no need to worry, Koutarou.”

Theia had an angelic smile. It was a kind smile that enveloped the frightful Koutarou. However, that smile only lasted for a moment. It then changed to that of a demon.

“Even if you're a gentle soul or evil incarnate, I will personally train you! You'll blow away everyone at that stage, two days from now!”

“I don't want to! I'll be blown away before then!”

“There's no need to be scared...”

With her eyes sparkling Theia approached Koutarou, step by step. Her fingers were wiggling, planning on grabbing a hold of Koutarou.

“I'm not helping with the show!”

“I won't let you refuse!”

Koutarou shook his head, but Theia refused to let him back down.

“I don't want to! I'll be knitting instead!”

“I just said I won't let you refuse!”

Theia's powerful will overpowered and erased Koutarou's protests. Her wiggling fingers finally grabbed a hold of him.

“I won't let you go until you've spilled your last drop of blood! I won't accept any protests!! You won't have a day of rest until you step onto the stage as the Blue Knight once more!!”

“Noooooooooo!!”

Forthorthe Galactic Empire's seventh princess, Theiamillis Gre Forthorthe was laughing in a manner befitting of royalty fit to rule over countless stars.

Everyone there was overwhelmed by her majestic presence.

“...If she could just be honest with herself, it would be much easier though...”

However, Ruth who had grown up alongside Theia was, for some reason, looking at the two with a cheerful smile.

Part 4

As Koutarou pushed the button two, three times, a red flame rose inside the old oil kerosene heater.

This aged heater had been used for several years in the knitting society, and compared to the more modern versions, it had terrible performance. But it was more than enough for a small society consisting of only two people. Since it was starting to get colder, it was a necessity to continue club activities.

Koutarou turned a dial on the heater to adjust the output. As he did, the flame’s color changed from red to blue, and the amount of smoke reduced drastically. After making sure that it was enough, he returned to his seat.

“Thank you, Satomi-kun.”

“It sure is cold today.”

“It really is. Recently the mornings have gotten a lot colder too.”

Koutarou and Harumi smiled at each other. The two were sitting close together in front of the heater. In the cold, their fingers would become less flexible, so the two of them naturally got closer in order to heat up in front of the heater.

“You sound like an old lady, senpai.”

“Satomi-kun, geez...”

Harumi moved her knitting needles and happily smiled. Although she was uncomfortable around men, if it was Koutarou, she had no problems being

this close to him. Harumi wasn't just close to him in person, but she also felt like they had gotten closer, relationship wise.

“Besides, we're knitting after all.”

“That's true, there's nothing youthful about this. Fufufu.”

The two of them showed each other their knittings and laughed. With the cold of December, the surrounding cultural clubs had calmed down, and the two's laughter echoed throughout the club building.

Having finished laughing, Harumi started at Koutarou's hands.

“Now that I think about it, that muffler has gotten quite a bit longer.”

Koutarou was hard at work, knitting a muffler. At first he had just been knitting it for practice, but once it reached a certain length, Harumi suggested he should make it into muffler.

“This is all thanks to you.”

“Would you mind showing it to me?”

“I don't mind.”

Koutarou stopped moving his knitting needles and presented her with a bag containing most of the muffler.

“It might be a bit too long for a person to use.”

Harumi pulled out the muffler from the bag and spread it out on a desk. As she said, the muffler was considerably long. He had been working on it since spring, and it was now reaching ten meters.

“That's because most of it is so poorly made.”

However, the quality of the muffler varied. Since he was continuing from his practice work, the first part of it had been made from all kinds of knitting techniques. Koutarou's crafting skills had been quite poor in the beginning, making the muffler stand out in a negative way.

“Only the last part of it could be used as a muffler.”

That said, having been knitting for eight months, even the clumsy Koutarou had begun improving, and the last meter was quite beautifully made.

“Oh, that's not true.”

Koutarou didn't think highly of the craftsmanship of his muffler, but Harumi thought otherwise.

“I love this first part.”

Harumi smiled as she gently patted the first part of the muffler.

“This part shows, more than anything, just how hard you've worked.”

The first part was from when Koutarou had just begun knitting. He moved the knitting needles in an awkward fashion and desperately tried to knit. Harumi who had been watching him from the side, couldn't imagine that part of the muffler being worthless. Instead, she felt the opposite; that first part held the most value.

“You're the only one who would say that, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“Fufu, when it comes to effort, I think that's true in most cases.”

That's right, I'm the only one who understands the value of this muffler. This muffler holds mine and Satomi-kun's memories...

The reason Harumi valued the muffler so highly was because of the several month’s worth of memories that had been imprinted in it.

Just by looking at a specific part of the muffler, she could remember what happened at that time.

Looking at the very first part made her remember her meeting with Koutarou and when he was just starting out in the knitting society. She remembered that she was so happy having found a companion.

When she touched the next part, she remembered the sports festival. She had participated alongside Koutarou, and actually won.

The next part was during the summer vacation. She recalled having met Koutarou at the sea by accident. At that point, Harumi had begun developing

feelings for Koutarou.

At the next part, Koutarou's skills had increased, and he had tried out various techniques. By then the culture festival was close and they had stood on top of the stage together. That was when Harumi became certain of how much Koutarou meant to her. Just a few days ago, she had Yurika help and went out to play with Koutarou.

To Harumi, this muffler was proof of her time with Koutarou.

“Mackenzie keeps telling me this is disgraceful for a man.”

“Well, it is true most normal men can't quite understand.”

Koutarou dropped his shoulders mortifyingly and Harumi began giggling.

“...Does that mean I'm not a normal man?”

“No, that's not what I meant, really...”

I understand, Satomi-kun...

While finding it humorous that Koutarou's best friend couldn't understand him, Harumi took pride in that only she knew the true value of his muffler.

“In that case, I'll harass Mackenzie by giving him this first part as a Christmas present.”

“Y-You can't, Satomi-kun! That would be such a waste!”

Koutarou and Harumi's laughter rang out from the knitting society's club room. The distance between them had shortened by the length of the muffler.

Part 5

After having laughed for a while, Koutarou began moving his knitting needles once more, Harumi also began working on her own knitting. However, the two of them continued talking.

“And then, Yurika started crying.”

“Nijino-san wanted to play a different role during the play after all.”

Back then in spring, Koutarou couldn't knit and talk at the same time. However after a couple of months, thanks to his skills improving, he became able to talk during his club activities. At the same time, Harumi had gotten used to being alone with Koutarou and often spoke as well.

“That said, she was really good as a horse...”

“Fufufu, not having her desires and talents line up is quite unfortunate of her.”

They were now talking about the part-time job offer that Kiriha had brought up. Yurika was their common friend, so talking about her naturally carried on to the part-time job.

In the end, those related to room 106 and Kenji ended up participating in the hero show. Since the youth department were obsessed about the star of the show, Harukaze-man, they had hired a professional to act as him. Koutarou and the others would be filling in the other roles.

Kiriha, who had brought up the offer, would be playing the evil executive, Black Rose. Because of her tall stature and good looks, she was thought to be perfect for the role.

Koutarou would be playing her subordinate, Baron Demon. He was a charismatic, invincible man committing cruelties with all of his might alongside his partner, Jet Black King. With the only men being Koutarou and Kenji, Koutarou was chosen for the baron role because of his larger body.

And in charge of his partner in crime, Jet Black King, was Yurika. Her acting of a horse's rear was already at the level of a master. She appealed to get a different role but since there was no one else for the role, she ended up getting it. Her acting during the Blue Knight's play was being praised, but Yurika was crying.

Theia would be playing the role of Princess Devil. She was the mastermind

behind Baron Demon and the personification of evil, plotting world domination. Since the Baron Demon swore his loyalty to her, Koutarou protested this casting. He wanted Shizuka and Theia to trade roles, but since it would hard to replace Shizuka, his request was denied.

Shizuka was in charge of Harukaze-man's partner, Kishou-lady. Since she had experience with martial arts, she had been chosen as the most suitable for that role. Because of that, she couldn't be switched out, and Theia ended up playing Devil Princess. Koutarou cried.

Ruth would be playing a random civilian. At first glance, it looked to be an easy role, but since she had to let out a powerful scream with the appearance of Baron Demon, and then give the crowd an accurate line to fire up the crowd for Harukaze-man's appearance, it turned out to be quite the technical role. Since the role required carefulness and politeness, Ruth was picked.

Kenji would be playing the host. The reason he was picked for this was because his gentle figure would be better received amongst the children and mothers, and his opinion that Koutarou would never be able to play a host. Adapting to the circumstances and firing up the crowd was something Kenji was good at. Koutarou complained about this as well, but nobody listened.

As a ghost, Sanae would be in charge of special effects and helping Koutarou with his lines. Since nobody could see or hear her, she was perfect as a prompter. And she was the perfect partner for Koutarou who had a hard time remembering his lines.

“So what role did you get, Satomi-kun? The lead again?”

“No, this time I'm a villain. I'm playing a heartless villain called Baron Demon.”

Koutarou pulled out a manuscript from his bag and flipped through the pages.

“Satomi-kun as a heartless villain...”

Harumi tilted her head. In her mind, she couldn't see Koutarou as a villain.

He was a bit mischievous, but she couldn't connect Koutarou and misdeeds. Because of that, she got interested in the hero show.

“I'm free on Sunday, so maybe I should go look.”

“You're welcome. Everyone’s—”

Koutarou was about to welcome her, but halfway through he noticed something, and revealed a mischievous smile.

“That's right, Sakuraba-senpai, why don't you participate in the hero show too?”

“Me!?”

Harumi was shocked by the unexpected proposal.

“Yes. We actually have too few people, and the script apparently needs to be rewritten. But if you join in, we should have enough.”

In the original version, there was one more character. The civilian that Ruth was playing had a boyfriend. Because they were lacking people, Kenji had to act as the host, leaving the boyfriend role empty. Because of that, the script was being changed slightly.

However, if Harumi were to join in, there would be no need to adjust the script. Harumi and Kenji would be the civilian couple, and Ruth would become the host. By doing that, they could use the original version.

“E-Even if you say that... just springing that so suddenly on me is troubling.”

Harumi, who was normally shy, was perplexed by the sudden offer to appear on stage. During the culture festival she had only managed because she was acting with Koutarou.

“You'll be fine. We all just heard about it today too. And if I'm not mistaken, your role wasn't that hard, Sakuraba-senpai.”

Leaving Harumi's perplexed expression aside, Koutarou cheerfully flipped

through the manuscript.

In the original version, the civilian woman's main job was just to let out a scream as she was abducted. It wasn't that complex of a role. However, without the boyfriend, all of the lines spoken between them had to be done by the woman, increasing the difficulty of the role. Because of that, Koutarou wasn't all that worried.

“B-But... I don't know if I could do it...”

However, Harumi couldn't imagine being abducted and screaming. Because of that she was worried she might end up unable to say any of her lines on stage.

“What is this popular actress saying?”

Koutarou laughed at the hesitating Harumi.

After the culture festival, Harumi's reputation skyrocketed. She was thought of as cute, but after her masterful acting on top of the stage she was now becoming a celebrity at Kitsushouharukaze High School. Since she wasn't that fond of getting attention, her life was becoming a little harder.

Koutarou who played the lead alongside Harumi was obscured by her fame, and so his life continued on as normal.

“At the start you flirt with Mackenzie, after that you'll be abducted by me. You only need to scream from time to time.”

“Screaming after being abducted by Satomi-kun...”

After hearing that Koutarou would abduct her, Harumi began fantasizing.

“Gahahahaha, what a good woman. I'll make you my wife!”

“Noooooooooo! Someone save meeee!”

Wearing a pitch black, spiky outfit, Koutarou would abduct her while laughing out loud.

That sounds a bit fun...

Having hesitated up until now, Harumi began thinking it would be fun after that fantasy. If it was by Koutarou, she didn't mind being abducted. Besides, she would often read books to the children at the hospital, so performing a hero show at the preschool would fulfill her desires.

“If that's all, then I should be able to...”

“Really? Please help us out!”

As Harumi agreed, Koutarou jumped out his chair in excitement. He then pulled out his cell phone from his pocket and called Kiriha. He was going to report that Harumi was going to be helping out right away.

“A hero show, huh... fufufu...”

While staring at Koutarou who began talking on his phone, Harumi smiled.

Just a while ago she was hesitant about what to do, but now she was looking forward to the hero show, two days from now.

The Intentions Behind the Invasion

Part 1

Sunday, December 13

The Sunday weather this morning was clear, and the anniversary event at Harukaze pre-school had started.

The events scheduled during the anniversary included class visits and a game tournament. During the tournament, they would be holding a hero show as entertainment. Therefore, Koutarou and the others wouldn't appear until the afternoon.

“Now then everyone, it's time for what you've been waiting for, Harukaze-man!”

Ruth's voice sounded out from the speakers. But there was still no one standing on top of the stage the youth department spent an entire night building.

“Let's all call for him together! Haaaruuukaaazeeemaaan!”

“Haaaruuukaaazeeemaaan!!”

Guided by Ruth, the children called out for Harukaze-man.

The next moment, small explosions occurred on each side of the stage, filling it with smoke. Once the smoke cleared, there were three people standing on top of the stage. Those were Koutarou, Theia and Kiriha; the three of them wearing strange outfits.

Koutarou was wearing a pitch black, spiky armor. Theia was wearing a black formal dress with bat wings on her back. Kiriha wore a kimono similar to what she always wore, except it had flashy black roses on it and her hair ornament imitated the thorns of a rose.

All of the outfits were from the high school's cosplay society, and they had

been designed with the villains in mind.

Theia stood in the center of the stage, crossing her arms and cockily throwing her head back, while Koutarou and Kiriha stood on each side of her.

The children of the pre-school had been impatiently waiting for their hero, but what had appeared instead were those three mysterious people. The children stared at amazement with their jaws wide open.

Theia grinned as she looked over the children and waved around a long cane while shouting in a loud voice.

“That's too bad, kids! Your beloved Harukaze-man won't be coming! That's because we, the Earth Empire, defeated him!”

After hearing Theia's loud voice, the children were shaken.

Their hero had been defeated.

To them, that was unheard of. They wanted to believe it was a lie, but in front of them where their hero was supposed to be were the evil trio. Because of that, the children panicked, and quite a few began crying.

“You're lying! That's definitely a lie!”

However, one courageous boy stood up. With tears in his eyes, he pointed at Theia and shouted.

“I won't fall for a lie from some tiny little shrimp like you!”

“What did you just say, you bastard!!”

Tiny shrimp.

Hearing that phrase, Theia lost sight of herself and got angry for real. Since she minded her height and sex appeal, even if the opponent was a preschooler, those words were humiliating to her.

“Do you know who you're saying those words to!?”

Theia shook her hair violently and threatened the boy with an aggressive

glare. The boy, who was the target of her aggressive attitude, froze and swallowed his saliva.

“This is bad, Koutarou, that's not acting!”

“...What are you doing, it's just a kid...”

Having been warned by Sanae, who had memorized everyone's lines, Koutarou lightly pulled on Theia's dress while whispered to her.

“...Calm down, Theia.”

“Shut up!”

However, having completely lost it, she ignored Koutarou and swatted his hand away. Her attention was now focused on the young boy.

“I'll show that impolite little brat—”

“...Once we get back, I'll play games with you for as many hours you want.”

Fortunately, Theia reacted to Koutarou's second attempt, and stopped moving. She then slowly turned towards him.

“...Y-You better not be lying.”

“Of course not.”

Just how mortified were you...

Tears had begun forming in Theia's eyes. Seeing that, Koutarou deeply felt that it would be best to do as she wanted.

“I understand. You better not go back on your word.”

Theia held her anger in and returned to normal. Sensing that, Kiriha added in an ad-libbed dialog to adjust the play.

“Princess Devil, leave this to I, Black Rose, and Baron Demon. We'll show this kid that there is no hero.”

“Very well, I'll leave it to you.”

“Understood. Go, Baron Demon! Make these kids understand that Harukaze-man has lost!”

“Leave it to me, Princess Devil, Black Rose-sama!”

Thanks to Kiriha's quick wit, the show that was about to derail returned to normal. Koutarou let out a sigh of relief and jumped off the stage in accordance to the script, and approached the seats reserved for the children's guardians.

“You there, come with me!”

He grabbed onto Harumi's arm, who was sitting there, and pulled her off her seat.

“Kyaaaaaaa!”

Harumi let out a terrified scream, but she looked at Koutarou with joy in her eyes.

“Harumi-chan!? Let go of my girlfriend you bastard!!”

As he pulled Harumi away, Kenji who was sitting next to her came flying at Koutarou. At the exact timing they had practiced several times-

“Pipe down!”

Koutarou threw his large mantle around. When he did, Kenji was sent flying and landed on his rear. Koutarou and Kenji's coordination was perfect; they moved just as they had done during rehearsal.

“Kenji-kun!?”

“Wahahaha, too bad youngster! This cute girl will become my wife!”

Even though she knew that was just a line in the manuscript, Harumi couldn't stop herself from blushing. She was embarrassed but happy; her heart was pounding loudly in her chest.

“Damnit, is there no justice in this world!?”

“That's too bad, justice died alongside Harukaze-man!! Come, Jet Black King!!”

“*Neigh*!”

While impersonating a black horse, Yurika came running in from the side-stage while neighing. This horse was the Baron Demon's partner, Jet Black King. Yurika's acting was perfect, and to the kids she looked like a real horse.

“From today on, the age of evil will begin! Harukaze-man is a man of the past!”

“Save meee~, Kenji-kuuu~n!!”

“Harumi-chaaa~n!!”

“Jet Black King, to the wedding hall!”

“*Neigh*!”

“How cruel! This atrocious injustice! Can this really be allowed!? Did justice, did Harukaze-man really die!?”

Ruth's voice echoed throughout the preschool, the children were sweating and holding their breaths.

From here on, Harukaze-man who supposedly died would appear and defeat Koutarou and the others. That was the plot of this show.

However, for some reason, the hero that appeared wasn't Harukaze-man.

“Let go of that woman, underground people!”

That voice rang out from behind the auditorium. It was a powerful voice supported by well-trained abs. It carried through the audience and reached Koutarou and the others on the stage.

Here he comes, Harukaze-man. —Wait, what?

Since the voice had come from a different place, Koutarou was confused.

“Koutarou, something's wrong, look.”

“Ah...”

According to the manuscript, Harukaze-man was supposed to appear alongside fireworks while Koutarou was abducting Harumi.

“As expected from the underground people, you have quite the unique outfits...”

“Do you have any good looking, manly executives!?”

“It looks like there's a young one, nee-chan.”

“Is there anything delicious around?”

“Why don't you get some of that candy they're handing out over there?”

And what's this? There's five of them...

What confused Koutarou even more was the number of supposed heroes that appeared. According to the plan, only two were supposed to confront them onstage: the man from the youth department acting as Harukaze-man, and Shizuka acting as Kishou-lady. The supposedly defeated Harukaze-man borrowed Kishou-lady’s power to revive. However, what had appeared weren't two people, but five. Not to mention, what they were wearing weren't hero outfits, but uniforms similar to a police officer’s.

“...Satomi-kun, who are those people?”

Harumi was confused as well and whispered her doubts to Koutarou.

“Let me try asking.”

Koutarou whispered back, and then shouted out.

“Who goes there!?”

In the original scene, this was where Koutarou was supposed to ask for their identity.

“We have no name to give for the likes that would attack a preschool! Let's go everyone!”

“Yeah!”

However, the five declined to answer and rushed toward the stage.

“Even though it's our first battle, there's no need to fear! Justice lies with us!”

“Senpai, I don't really get it, but they seem to be heroes.”

Based on their behavior, Koutarou concluded that the five were heroes. Their lines and actions lined up perfectly with how heroes behaved.

“I wonder, is this some kind of surprise?”

“Or maybe there was some trouble, and they called in for substitutes?”

Koutarou and Harumi embraced and stared at each other. Normally they would be blushing, but in this situation they didn’t even mind it.

“This is not in script.”

“Hmm...”

When Koutarou looked up at the stage, he saw that both Theia and Kiriha were just as confused as he was. He then looked at the host Ruth, who should have been told beforehand, but she looked at Koutarou and shrugged her shoulders.

Ruth-san doesn't know either. Yurika... obviously wouldn't know... Well, should we continue?

In the end, Koutarou decided to proceed with the show.

He couldn't imagine the heroes arriving with this timing being unrelated, and if heroes and villains were gathered, there should be no problems continuing the show. Whether it was a surprise or trouble, carelessly cancelling the show would only disappoint the children.

“Alright, let's continue, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“Yes.”

Koutarou nodded at Harumi and winked at Theia and Kiriha on top of the stage. Understanding his intentions, the two of them nodded.

“Mackenzie.”

“I know, leave it to me.”

Koutarou was about to signal Ruth and Kenji as well, but the two of them had already taken action.

“Justice hasn't died! Look everyone, evil will never prosper!”

“With the absence of Harukaze-man, this mysterious group of five have appeared! Are they messengers of justice, or have they only gotten ahead of themselves!? Either way, let's all cheer for them!!”

Kenji and Ruth fired up the spectating children. As they did, the children overcame the shock of Harukaze-man being defeated and cheered at the new heroes.

“You can do it!”

“Beat up those bad guys!”

“Leave it to us, justice always wins!”

As the group of five ran through the center of the auditorium, they were showered with cheers left and right.

As they got closer, differentiating their figures became easier.

“I'm all fired up!!”

The person running at the front was a short-haired young man. Based on his appearance, he looked like an athletic type, similar to Koutarou.

“Let the games begin!!”

Behind him was a short boy. He might have been even younger than

Koutarou and the others. His round face and large glasses gave him the impression of a young boy.

“Where are the handsome executives!?”

The third was the only woman in the group. She gave off the impression of having a strong will with her long black hair and thick eyebrows.

“This candy isn't all that good.”

The fourth was a fat man. Not unlike his appearance, he was a man with a vigorous appetite. Even now he was holding onto a bag of candy. It was the candy that was being handed out to the children during this event.

“So this is a fight!”

The last one was a man with long hair and shades. However, his hairstyle and shades seem to have come from the past. He looked like an overly motivated teacher that would appear a long time ago in shoujo mangas.

“...They all seem to be old fashioned characters, but I guess that's just right for a hero show.”

“Did you say something, Satomi-kun?”

“No, senpai, let's get up on the stage too. You too, Yurika.”

“Okay.”

“*Neigh*”

Koutarou and the others hurried back onto the stage. If they weren't on the stage before the group of five got there, it could become a problem during the dialog.

“Hooo!”

The group of five climbed up the stage in a theatrical fashion. Koutarou used Harumi as a shield and shouted clearly at the group.

“Wahahaha, it doesn't matter how many of you there are! There's nothing for

us to fear now that Harukaze-man has been defeated!”

“Noooooo, somebody save meeee!”

Harumi screamed out with perfect timing. She didn't really want someone to save her. But personal desires and stage acting were different.

“Curse you, let go of that woman!”

“Very well. I would rather not use my wife as shield either.”

Koutarou followed the script and chained Harumi's legs and bound her to a nearby pillar. Harumi then tugged on the chains repeatedly to show that she had no way of escaping.

“More importantly, I have no need for hostages! I defeated Harukaze-man with ability alone!”

The overconfident enemy relinquishes his hostage; it was the necessary element required for the heroes to turn things around.

I'll leave the rest to you, heroes.

The preparations had all been made. All that was left was for the heroes to shine.

“Go, Baron Demon! Crush this impudent bunch!”

“Baron Demon, let us present their heads to Princess Devil!”

“Yes my liege!”

In accordance to Theia and Kiriha's signaling, Koutarou and Kiriha stepped up while Theia stayed behind and smiled confidently. The decisive battle was about to start.

“Alright everyone, let's transform!”

“Yeah!”

The group of five seemed to know the drill as well and began their

transformation sequence.

“Hmm... so they're going to transform here...”

Sanae's words of admiration reached Koutarou's ears.

Unlike in a TV show, transforming live on a stage was difficult; they would need to use a smoke screen, or cleverly use their set pieces for the actors to get changed. It also took quite a bit of coordination and people to pull it off. In reality (that is, in this Harukaze-man show), there weren't enough people to do so, and Harukaze-man would appear on stage, already transformed. Despite that, this group was going to transform on stage. This impressed Sanae.

“Maybe the ones helping out are real actors...”

“That might be it.”

Similarly impressed themselves, Koutarou and Kiriha stared at the group of five raising their right hands in the air.

“Trans-form!”

They brandished their right hands in the air while using their left hands to push a button on their belt. From there they moved both their hands together, drawing a large arc and finally ending their motion, pointing to the right.

“Oh!?”

It was a transformation pose so skillfully done that it amazed Koutarou. Even though he was considerably fond of transforming heroes, he had nothing to complain about after seeing that perfect pose.

The group’s bodies were covered by white smoke. Inside the smoke, their unique silhouettes could be seen moving. Once the smoke cleared, the five warriors wearing round helmets appeared. It looked like their outfits were completely different from before. It wasn't just some clever change, but as if they had changed outfits. It was a splendid transformation for a hero show.

However, there was one big problem with their transformation.

“Red Shine.”

“Red Shine.”

“Red Shine.”

“Red Shine.”

“Red Shine.”

“All together we are The Sun Squad, Sun Rangers!”

For some reason, the group of five posing with background music and fireworks were all red.

“Wherever there is love, there is justice! In this world—”

“Quit messing around!!”

The moment he saw them, Koutarou ignored the show and dashed forward. His face was dyed red by rage and he smacked the head of the Red Shine standing in the center.

“W-What are you doing, Baron Demon-san!?”

“I don't care! How can you do everything so well and then trip up at the very end!?”

“J-Just wait a moment, Baron-san, what are you so angry about!?”

“As if I'd wait!! Is that it!? Are you the same as Yurika!?”

“What do you mean by the same as me!?”

Koutarou was, of course, angry about the group’s costumes. It was an unspoken rule, or common sense that for a kids’ show, the costumes should differ by color. Because of that, Koutarou couldn't hide his intense rage when the group of five had ignored that rule, even more so when everything leading up to the transformation had been so well done.

“Why would you ruin all of our hard work like that!! Are you amateurs!?”

“S-Sorry, Baron-san, I can't quite understand why you're so angry, this is our first time!!”

“As if I could forgive you because of that!!”

“Oh no, this is not good! All five Sun Rangers are wearing red costumes!”

“That's it, Kenichi! Baron-san is angry about these suits!”

“I see!”

Hearing Ruth's narrative, the feminine Red Shine whispered to the center Red Shine. He finally understood the reason behind Koutarou's anger.

The kids in the audience felt the same way and gave the Sun Rangers a sceptic look.

“Sensei, why are those Sun Rangers all red?”

“Which one is which?”

“Maybe there's only one real and the rest are fakes?”

“It's just the worst when you wear the same as someone else.”

All of the voices raised negatives points, and the Sun Rangers were losing their support.

“What do we do, Koutarou? The show’s turning into a mess.”

“I don't know. If you want to complain, do it to those idiots!”

Koutarou's rage continued. Having grown up watching hero shows on TV, he couldn't forgive them for cutting corners(?). Although he knew that doing a show live on a stage required you to cut some corners, this was one part you should never miss out on. He couldn't accept the all-red Sun Rangers.

“...Despite everything you say, you're quite picky when it comes to cosplay, Satomi-san...”

Yurika gave Koutarou a cold glance from inside the papier-mâché horse, Jet Black King. However that was just for a moment; she soon began smiling.

“But, but, it looks like Satomi-san might cosplay together with us if it's from hero shows. I have to tell everyone in the cosclub♪”

Yurika and the cosplay society's relation had been improving recently.

In order to graduate from high school, she had to hide her identity as a magical girl and once she calmed down and thought about it, it wasn't like she hated what they were doing. Because of that, Yurika had begun changing her mind about cosplaying.

“It looks like we should be tempting him with an ancient hero role♪”

Despite everyone around her being confused, Yurika was having fun.

“Get lost! I can't fight with failures like you!”

“Eeeeh!? Y-You won't fight us!?”

Koutarou's harsh words shook the five Sun Rangers.

“I don't even want to talk to you! Go away!”

Shaking with anger, Koutarou turned around after saying that. As he did, the middle Red Shine desperately tried to stop him.

“P-Please wait, Baron-san! We only formed a year ago and this is our first sortie! If there's anything wrong, we'll work hard to fix it!”

“Then go home and fix your suits! Red is the color of the leader! We have our pride as villains. We won't fight a failure squad like you!”

“But, we can't fix our suits right now!”

Amidst the confusion on the stage, small laughter could be heard. The laughs spread throughout the crowd and soon everyone was laughing.

“Sun Rangers, hurry and change! With the wedding looming, Baron Demon is very impatient!”

Sensing the change in the crowd, Ruth decided to push through the situation as if it was a comedy. She strung words together in rapid succession and fired up the crowd.

“Everyone! Let's cheer for the Sun Rangers! It's only a matter of time before the Baron Demon loses his temper completely!”

“You can do it, Sun Rangers!”

“Hurry up and change!”

“I don't know which one's the old man with sunglasses, but you can do it, old man!”

“Shut up, who are you calling an old man!? I'm still only 20!”

A Red Shine reminiscent of the long haired man in shades shouted at the kids. As he did, the child began crying out loudly.

“Waaaaaah, the Sun Rangers... The Sun Rangers...!!”

“Oh, that's not good, Sun Rangers. You can't fight with a child!”

“You idiot!!”

Koutarou swung his fist towards the tall Red Shine who made a child cry.

“You guys don't understand anything! You're scum, below even third-rate heroes! Why would you make children cry!? Are you trying to destroy their dreams!? You don't have the right to call yourselves heroes!”

Koutarou had reached his limit. He recalled his own childhood and his admiration for heroes, so he couldn't forgive the Sun Rangers who didn't act like heroes at all.

“Baron-san, please wait!!”

“Geez, it's all your fault he got so angry again old man.”

“I'm not an old man, Kotarou.”

“...Wonderful, Baron Demon-sama, wonderful!!”

“It looks like Megu-chan's sickness has started again, everyone.”

Seeing the Sun Rangers struggling so hard, Yurika began feeling a sense of closeness for some reason.

I wonder what this feeling is...

Having been yelled at by Koutarou for making kids cry, the Sun Rangers no longer looked anything like heroes, and the negative aura around them called out to Yurika. However, having become more positive as of late, Yurika didn't notice that was the spirit of a loser.

“Children in the crowd, answer me this!! Are these the heroes you wanted!? Or is it someone else!?”

Koutarou's mantle fluttered and he shouted out to the children in the audience.

“Is this all that justice has to offer!? Tell me, children!! Who should I be fighting!?”

Then a small child stood up to answer Koutarou's question.

“Harukaze-maaa~n!! Help us, Harukaze-maaa~n!!”

Despite the child’s small size, his shout was full of courage, and it encouraged the other children in the preschool to join in.

“Harukaze-man!!”

“Hurry up and save that lady, please, Harukaze-man!!”

“The Sun Rangers are no good, Harukaze-man!!”

The children screamed in succession, and filled the stage.

And that's when it happened.

Fireworks exploded on the stage, and inside the smoke, two silhouettes

appeared. They posed inside the smoke and introduced themselves loudly.

“Courage! That is the power of hope within a person!”

“Love! That is an indestructible heart that supports courage!”

“We are soldiers of courage and love!”

A gust of wind blew away the smoke surrounding the two silhouettes.

“Harukaze-man!”

“Kishou-lady!”

“Evil will never prosper while we still stand!!”

Two heroes, a man and a woman, appeared, wearing suits that were quite obviously handmade. The suits they were wearing had been made by the youth department and were of lower quality when compared to the Sun Rangers' suits.

“Harukaze-maaa~n!! Harukaze-maaa~n!”

However, the children cheered for them, screaming at the top of their lungs. Their cheers were several times louder than when the Sun Rangers had appeared. For a true hero, looks were not a problem.

“It looks like you've been having your way, Baron Demon!”

“Wahahaha, did you come to get done in again, Harukaze-man!?”

And with a true hero, evil could shine. Koutarou returned to his role and turned towards the new heroes.

“I have returned from hell to defeat you! This time you'll be going there!”

“Wahahaha, telling a demon to go to hell is a fun joke! It seems that you still have a way with words after reviving, Harukaze-man!”

With the appearance of Harukaze-man and Kishou-lady, the show returned to normal. And it ended as a complete success.

Part 2

“Thank you, Harukaze-man, Kishou-lady!”

Carried away by their parents, the last child waved his hand and left the stage. The man playing Harukaze-man, and Shizuka playing Kishou-lady waved and saw the child off.

“Well, this was a big success thanks to you, Kiriha-san, Koutarou-kun.”

Once the children had left, the neighborhood association member in charge of the show called out to them. Koutarou and the others had taken off the outfits and removed their make-up, but it wasn't a topic that could be brought up in front of the children.

“I wasn't sure what would happen when Harukaze-man couldn't show up, but you managed to keep it up really well, you were a huge help.”

“Why did it take so long until you showed up?”

“It's a bit embarrassing but, it's almost like the suit was cursed. When we were just about to appear, we noticed that the suit had torn.”

The man playing Harukaze-man dropped his shoulders. He then pulled off the chest piece and showed the backside of it to Koutarou. It had been taped back together, a desperate solution to say the least. Just before they were about to appear on stage, they noticed the tear, rendering Harukaze-man and Kishou-lady unable to appear just yet.

“I see.”

Kiriha who had looked at the tear alongside Koutarou, smiled and nodded.

“But that wasn't thanks to us, but rather thanks to the substitutes you sent up.”

“Yeah. Those Sun Rangers really helped out...”

Koutarou nodded to Kiriha's words. They had only been able to buy enough time for Harukaze-man to appear thanks to the Sun Rangers. In the end,

Koutarou and the others were amateurs, and they wouldn't have been able to buy so much time on their own.

“Huh?”

The man playing Harukaze-man looked dumbfounded.

“Weren't those Sun Rangers your friends?”

“Eh?”

“We were certain that you had called your friends over to help.”

“Didn't the neighborhood association prepare them?”

Koutarou and the neighborhood association had a difference in recognition regarding the Sun Rangers.

Koutarou and the others had assumed that the neighborhood association had prepared substitutes in the case that something happened. Meanwhile, the neighborhood association assumed that Koutarou and the others had asked their friends to help them.

They were convinced that the other party had prepared the Sun Rangers.

“What does this mean?”

“Your highness, wouldn't it be best if we asked them directly?”

“That's true.”

Koutarou and the others went looking for the Sun Rangers, but they couldn't find the group in question.

“Mackenzie, do you know where they went?”

Once Harukaze-man appeared, Kenji's role had nothing to do. So Koutarou asked Kenji if he had seen where the Sun Rangers had gone.

“The last time I saw them, they were sneaking off the stage so they wouldn't get in the way of Harukaze-man and Kishou-lady's fight. I don't know where

they went after that.”

However, Kenji shook his head. After his role was finished, he enjoyed the hero show alongside the children.

“What about you, Sakuraba-senpai?”

“I don't know either. Sorry.”

Harumi shook her head while blushing slightly. She had been staring at Koutarou fighting, so it didn’t even register to her that the Sun Rangers had left.

“Just who were those people?”

Everyone began scratching their heads as Kiriha asked that. They were all equally confused.

Meanwhile, the Sun Rangers in question were in the middle of an evaluation meeting. They were sorting out the problems they encountered during this sortie.

“First off, I believe the biggest failure this time was completely trusting a preschooler.”

The old man with a white beard and lab coat wrote what he had just said on a whiteboard. The whiteboard had been borrowed from somewhere and put in the small office, where inside were the old man and a group of five. That group was of course the Sun Rangers. They were sitting down by their desks and were looking at the whiteboard and old man with serious faces.

“As a result, we ended up intruding on a hero show that had nothing to do with the underground people.”

The old man encircled the words 'hero show' with a red pen.

That's right. It might be hard to believe, but these Sun Rangers were true heroes, intended to fight against the underground people.

The Sun Squad, Sun Rangers had been established as a precaution for unknown foreign threats, but with the appearance of the threat known as the underground people, they stepped out of the shadows and into the spotlight.

By the way, this professor was known as Roppongi. Although the Sun Rangers were a secret battle squad, he had been designated as their commander because of a principle demanding civilian control.

“But professor, the detector showed an underground people reaction.”

The shortest amongst the five showed a device similar to a handheld game to the old man. This member’s name was Kotarou. He was the youngest of the group.

“About that, this detector doesn't work on underground people, but the technology they use. Because of that, there is a rare chance that it can detect something completely unrelated to them.”

“Which means that we blindly trusted in a preschooler and the detector was, unfortunately, wrong?”

Another member continued where Kotarou left off. His name was Kenichi, his short haircut and sharp glance gave off the impression of a healthy young man. He was also the first Red Shine that Koutarou hit.

“Precisely. It looks like we better reconsider the accuracy of our information and of our detector.”

Roppongi nodded at Kenichi while touching the detector.

“However, regarding the detector, its utility has been proven in other districts. Even though there's a chance for a mistaken reading, we should continue using it.”

In truth, there were more squads other than the Sun Rangers that were established to deal with unknown foreign threats. They were the ones in charge of this region, but there were several other squads placed all over the

country.

In the other regions, the detector was producing results and they had been able to suppress attacks from the underground people. However, they hadn't reported any mistaken readings, and the only ones currently with this problem was the Sun Rangers.

“Professor, can't we solve both of those problems with the same method?”

“What do you mean, Hayato-kun?”

The man that Roppongi called out to, Hayato, was a tall young man with long hair and shades. As one could guess based on the fact that he was wearing glasses despite being in a dimly lit room, he was a bit of a narcissist.

He smiled slightly and spread out his arms as he answered Roppongi's question.

“...Instead of believing blindly in a child’s words or in the detector’s result, we confirm their identity using a different method.”

“I see, that's a reasonable opinion. Very well. In the future, let’s double and triple check our results to be certain.”

The group of five nodded at Roppongi's words. Seeing that, Roppongi erased the words he had written on the whiteboard. He was planning on moving onto the next topic.

“Now then, as for the next topic—”

“Baron Demon-sama!! It's about Baron Demon-sama, right!?”

The only woman in the room interrupted Roppongi. Her name was Megumi. She was a girl in her late teens. Megumi stood out with her long black hair, thick eyebrows and gave off the impression of having a strong will. However, right now she was showing none of that strong will. She twined her fingers as she clasped her hands while her eyes sparkled.

“T-That's true but...”

“Ahh, I want to meet that person again! I want him to scold me!”

“M-Megumi-kun?”

As Roppongi was confused by Megumi staring at the nothing while getting excited, the last of the five that had been quiet up until now spoke up.

“Professor, it's Megu-chan's sickness again. It seems like that villain at that show was just her type...”

After finishing his explanation he put a curry chip in his mouth. His name was Daisaku. He was the largest member of the Sun Rangers. That said, since he was always eating something, his body hadn't grown in height, but rather in width.

“Even if you say that, despite Baron-sama's cool appearance, he had a fire burning inside of him, and even though he was a villain he was refreshingly reasonable!”

Megumi recalled her meeting with Baron Demon. She recalled his intense anger while hitting the Red Shine and when he severely scolded the Red Shine that made a child cry.

The memories were beautified, and an image completely different from the original Baron Demon was burned into her memory. What appeared in her mind was a scene where lots of roses bloomed behind the Baron, while he smiled at her with his shiny teeth.

ホテ

“...Honestly, I can't keep up with Megumi when she's like this.”

“Same here. But fortunately, she's not the only woman on this planet.”

“That's true. Thank god...”

Kenichi and Hayato shared the same opinion. They looked at Megumi with cold glances and nodded at each other.

“Can't we just leave nee-chan to Daisaku-oniichan?”

Kotarou pointed to Daisaku, who was in the middle of handing a handkerchief to Megumi.

“Aaa~h, I wish I was abducted and forced into marriage!!”

“Megu-chan, your nose is bleeding.”

“Thank you, Daisaku-kun.”

Megumi received the handkerchief from Daisaku and blew her nose. She had gotten too excited and gotten a nose bleed.

“Do you love Baron-san that much, Megu-chan?”

“Of course! There are not that many good men like that left!”

Megumi began explaining all the good parts about Baron Demon while blowing her nose while Daisaku just smiled and listened to her, not voicing any complaints.

“Daisaku is good at taking care of others...”

“He's the type of person that would lose out on being too good.”

Kenichi and Hayato looked at Daisaku with pity in their eyes. He continued to earnestly listen to Megumi. Pleased by that fact, Megumi's expression brightened up and she continued talking.

“Unexpectedly enough, I think those two would get along well together.”

“Do you think so...?”

Kotarou believed that Megumi and Daisuke would make for a good combination, but unfortunately enough, nobody else agreed with him.

The next topic Roppongi wrote on the whiteboard wasn't directly about Baron Demon. The Sun Rangers were painfully aware that it was just a show. So Roppongi was bringing up the problems that Baron Demon had pointed out.

“Holding back on the costs and getting restless regarding the underground people's appearance and hurrying up the completion of the suits was a mistake.”

“The problem regarding the coloring of the suits.”

The next topic Roppongi had brought up was the problem that had gotten Baron Demon so angry: the color of the group’s suits.

The Sun Squad, Sun Rangers' battle suits had been made by gathering the most cutting edge technology available. Just by wearing it, the user’s strength was increased fivefold. They would able to run as fast as a beast, and its durability equaled to that of steel. It was a new era of personal equipment superior to all kinds of bulletproof vests.

However, because of its performance, it took quite a bit of time and money to create. The suits had only reached the Sun Rangers just before their first sortie. Because of that, they didn't have enough time to color them, so they had to depart while all of the suits were red.

Those were the circumstances behind all five of them being Red Shine. When Baron Demon pointed it out, the problem came to light.

“Thinking about it, with everyone wearing the same thing, it becomes hard telling everyone apart.”

After the professor had put his pen down, Kenichi, who had been seriously

thinking about the problem, voiced his opinion. Hayato nodded, showing that he agreed with Kenichi.

“That's true, everyone looks the same. If for example, someone got into trouble, it would be hard to tell who needed help at first glance.”

Since they were government issued outfits, all five suits had the same design. And because of the suits functions, they were required to wear full face helmets. Because of that, the five would be unable to tell each other apart when wearing their suits.

The only one they could tell from first glance was Daisaku's with his large body. Kenichi and Hayato had a similar build, so it was hard to tell them apart, and Kotarou and Megumi were almost the same height.

There was a possibility that not being able to tell each other apart during an important battle could become a big problem.

“Why can't you notice something like that from the start!?”

Finished with her fantasies, Megumi returned to her normal self. She raised her thick eyebrows and voice.

“You didn't notice either, nee-chan.”

“Megu-chan, you were only able to meet Baron-san because we were all wearing red.”

“Ah yes, that's true♪”

However, thanks to Daisaku, Megumi's expression changed.

“Aaa~hn, Baron-samaaa~...”

Her anger disappeared and she vanished into her own private world.

“...Well, leaving Megumi-kun aside. Would anyone be against coloring the suits to tell them apart?”

“It should be fine. Baron-san and the children said it would be better and

easier to understand too.”

“That's true. Thinking of the future, it would be easier if the children cheered for us.”

Countries with powerful police forces were all trying to improve the image of their officers. If the occupation was always amongst the top jobs that kids want to become someday, it would be easier for them to move about. It meant that their desire to protect the peace would be respected. Although they weren't police officers, the same could be said for the Sun Rangers.

“But professor, if we can't tell each other apart, the same is true for the underground people, right? Wouldn't it be dangerous to change the colors?”

“I see, that's a possible problem. You're clever, Kotarou.”

“Hehe.”

Kenichi was impressed by Kotarou, and Kotarou laughed proudly.

If everyone could be differentiated by color, there could be counter measures put into action to deal with them. Differentiating the colors to be able to identify one another would work as an advantage for the enemy as well.

“How about this? We change the color from time to time. That way, it wouldn't matter how many plans they made.”

However, Hayato easily solved that problem. By changing their colors when necessary, they wouldn't have to worry about the enemy taking data about them. It was a simple but effective strategy.

“Yes, let's go with that, Hayato-kun. It's a good method where only we would gain an advantage.”

And just like that, it was decided that the Sun Rangers would be colored differently.

“Now then, all that's left is to discuss who gets what color.”

The only problem left was the coloring itself: who would get what color?

“If I'm not mistaken, Baron-san said that red is the leader’s color.”

“Which means that I'm red.”

“Wait, Hayato, I should be red.”

Kenichi and Hayato's opinions began clashing. Both of them wanted to be the leader, Kenichi, because he was hot-blooded and it was in his nature to lead, and Hayato, because it was cool.

“What are you saying!? It's important to remain calm during a fight, Kenichi, and that's impossible for a hot-blooded idiot like yourself!”

“And you're calm!? Now I want to know what you're saying!! Did you forget that during that show you made a child cry and made Baron-san angry!?”

That said, neither of them had any characteristics of a leader. They kept on arguing, never reaching an agreement.

“I didn't forget! That's why I won't make the same mistake again! I'll show you that I'd be a splendid leader that even Baron-san would recognize!”

“I wouldn't even make that mistake to begin with! You're a narcissist! All you can think about is yourself!”

“Haaah...”

As Kenichi and Hayato continued arguing, Kotarou let out a small sigh. Normally Kenichi and Hayato got along well, but once they didn't see eye to eye to something, they would never agree with each other. And with the position as leader at stake, Kotarou couldn't imagine either of them backing down anytime soon. So Kotarou looked for help from the one with most common sense, Megumi.

“Megumi-neechan, say something to stop them.”

“The forbidden love between a heroine of justice and an executive of evil!

Good, so very good! And in the end, having been woken up by the power of love, Baron-sama would become an ally of justice!”

“Megu-chan, you're drooling.”

“And then, Baron-sama would say 'Megumi, you're so cute'. Kyaaa~!”

However, betraying his expectations, Kotarou wasn't able to get any help from Megumi.

“Megu-chan, you're a girl, so you should at least worry about your appearance a little.”

“...This is useless.”

“What to do...”

At this point, Kotarou and Roppongi felt that Daisaku would be good enough as a leader.

Part 3

Once they had finished cleaning up, Sanae and Yurika dashed out from the preschool.

“Come on, Yurika, hurry, hurry! If we don't hurry, Magical Girl Love Love Heart is going to start without us!”

“Even if you tell me to hurry, I'm not that good at running.”

If they rushed home now, they would be able to see an anime that started at six in the evening. However, since Yurika wasn't a fast runner, they weren't certain if they would make it in time for the opening theme.

“If you want I can possess you and force you to run faster.”

“N-Noooooo! Anything but that!!”

“...So you CAN run faster if you get motivated.”

However, for some reason, Yurika's running speed increased dramatically and

shortly thereafter, Koutarou, who was seeing them off, lost sight of them.

“I just hope Yurika doesn't get hit by a car on her way home...”

Seeing Yurika's overly desperate expression as she turned a corner, Koutarou felt a little worried.

“Koutarou.”

“Satomi-sama, good work today.”

“Yeah, you too.”

Theia and Ruth approach him. The two of them noticed that Sanae and Yurika were gone and looked around the area.

“Satomi-sama, I can't seem to find Sanae-sama and Yurika-sama anywhere.”

“Those two already went home. They said something about watching an anime.”

“...I see, so those two aren't here.”

Theia glanced over at the direction to Corona House before turning towards Koutarou.

Koutarou is alone...

Recently, either Sanae or Yurika had always been at Koutarou's side. Sanae had been like that for a while, but now Yurika had gotten a lot closer to Koutarou as well. Yurika's feelings seemed to have changed, and Theia had been wondering about the sudden change of heart.

Because of those circumstances, it was rare to see Koutarou alone.

“...Once we get home you'll be playing games with me for hours.”

Theia recalled the words Koutarou had said during the show. As she did, she began losing her composure.

I-If things go well, Koutarou and I would be playing g-games all alone...

Theia had been envious of Sanae and Yurika who had gotten a lot closer to Koutarou, so she had no intention of letting this chance slip by. In this situation without Sanae or Yurika, she would be alone with Koutarou. Just the thought of it made her heart pound wildly.

But w-what should I say in this situation? How could I express my feelings without inviting a misunderstanding!?

However, Theia hadn't fully understood her romantic feelings for Koutarou yet, and was uncertain on what she should do. She was only vaguely thinking about how to get along with him. Thinking that it was all for the trial, she was getting in the way of her own feelings. Because her goal was so vague, her methods were equally so.

Your highness...

Noticing that Theia was panicking and desperately thinking of what to do, Ruth revealed a small smile and decided to lend a helping hand.

“Maybe you should play games onboard the Blue Knight, your highness?”

“Eh?”

Theia, who had been deep in thought, opened her eyes wide. Surprised by the sudden voice, she had completely failed to hear what Ruth had said. Seeing that, Ruth's smile grew larger.

“Since Sanae-sama and Yurika-sama are using the TV, you wouldn’t be able to play games on it, so you should just play games in your room onboard the Blue Knight instead.”

Since Sanae and Yurika were occupying the TV in room 106, if they wanted to play video games, they had no choice but to do so in Theia's room onboard the Blue Knight. However, Theia didn't understand why Ruth had brought that up.

“Y-Yes...”

Despite her hesitation, pushed on by Ruth's smile, Theia nodded.

Ruth?

Noticing Theia's glance, Ruth nodded back and looked at Koutarou for a brief moment. Theia followed suit and looked at Koutarou.

“Alright. When I've finished buying food, I'll come over.”

Having heard their discussion, Koutarou thought for a moment before responding. If he was going to be playing games with Theia, and she was aboard the Blue Knight, then he had no choice but to go there as well. Besides, having trained onboard for the show, he had been on the ship countless times, so he didn't really have any reluctance about going there.

“Ah...”

Theia then finally noticed Ruth's intentions. When she hurried to look towards her, she found Ruth smiling gently at her.

As is expected of Satomi-sama. He makes sure to keep his promises...

Ruth thanked Koutarou repeatedly on the inside. If she put it like that, Koutarou was sure to come onboard the Blue Knight. That's what Ruth believed, but she was very happy that he had responded to her expectations. Ruth was from the famous family of knights, Pardomshiha, so she valued promises and oaths above all else. And her love for her precious princess was bursting through her smile.

If he goes along with her highness, I'm sure he'll be able to protect her...

Looking at Koutarou as a knight, he still had a long way to go. He hadn't finished learning all the proper manners or techniques. However, when it came to promises and oaths, Koutarou valued those more than any knight Ruth had seen.

Even if a knight's sword was to break, it wouldn't matter as long as the oath sworn upon it hadn't. That was a proverb from Forthorthe. Ruth believed that

the saying didn't just apply to swords, but to people as well. Even if the person wasn't very knightly, it didn't matter as long as the oath or promise was real. A person could just be trained to become a knight later, but an oath or promise couldn't be trained.

Satomi-sama, please accept her highness...

Ruth's wish wasn't just for Theia's sake, but also for her own.

“In that case, I'm going to go on back now.”

“Theia, you really do love games.”

“Not 'you'! It's Princess Theiamillis!”

“Yes, yes, dear Princess Theiamillis.

The image of Koutarou and Theia sitting next to each other playing games appeared in Ruth's mind. At times they would swear at one another, and at other times they would get in the way of the other by messing with their controller. Ruth wished that she had a place next to them.

Kiriha and Harumi arrived next to Koutarou a few minutes after Theia and Ruth had returned to the Blue Knight.

“Oh? Where's landlord-san?”

Since Koutarou was planning on going home together with Kiriha and Shizuka, he looked around the area for her. Seeing that, Harumi explained the circumstances to Koutarou.

“Satomi-kun, it seems like Kasagi-san was offered another part-time job.”

“A part-time job?”

At that moment, Koutarou spotted Shizuka in the preschool’s office. She was talking with a person from the youth department and a man he hadn't seen before. That man was the one that had offered Shizuka a new part-time job.

“It seems like a pro was watching today's show.”

Kiriha replaced Harumi and explained in more detail.

Today's show was very enjoyable, even in the eyes of a professional. What impressed the professional the most was Shizuka's movements as Kishou-lady. Knowing martial arts, Shizuka pulled off some very intense moves, despite her feminine looks. Thus, she had been offered to try a part-time job, which also served as her audition.

“Hmm, that's amazing, landlord-san...”

“If everything goes well, she'll be an action star.”

After hearing the circumstances, Koutarou was impressed. Harumi shadow punched twice before smiling at Koutarou.

“Action is probably impossible for you, senpai.”

“I have a knight to defend me, so I don't need to fight.”

“Leave it to me, princess Alaia.”

“Fufufu.”

“Anyways, that's why Kasagi-san told us to go on without her.”

“I see. I guess it can't be helped.”

As he laughed together with Harumi, Koutarou looked towards the office once more after listening to Kiriha.

He didn't need a lot of imagination to guess that it would take some time before they're done, if they were talking about a part-time job. That said, since he had to stop by the mall on his way home, he couldn't just sit here and wait.

“Alright. Senpai, Kiriha-san, let's go home.”

“Okay.”

“Yes.”

Koutarou and the others left the preschool and headed home.

“Well, Satomi-kun, Kurano-san, I'll be taking my leave here.”

Just before the mall, Harumi separated with Koutarou and Kiriha. Her home was in a different direction, so this was as far as she could go.

“Okay, I'll see you tomorrow at school.”

“Goodbye, Sakuraba-senpai.”

“Goodbye, you two.”

Harumi smiled at the two and walked down a different street. Koutarou and Kiriha saw her off, after she waved at them once more and turned around a corner, they began walking again.

“Kiriha-san, what should we buy today?”

“Eggs, natto that's on sale, transparent garbage bags and some vegetables.”

Once it was just the two of them, Kiriha began acting like normal. Seeing that, Koutarou felt slightly relieved. It just didn't feel right to him when she acted like someone else and pretended to be an honors student.

Kiriha was normally more formal and strict. When she was acting like an honors student, she was a whole lot friendlier. But even so, Koutarou preferred Kiriha this way. He felt more warmth from her that way. Because of that, Koutarou unconsciously spoke a lot more to Kiriha when she was acting like herself. The same was true this time; he got quite a bit talkative.

“That's right, vegetables. Yurika's skin has been getting rough lately, so let's feed her lots of vegetables.”

“That's because she eats a lot of instant noodles.”

“I know. And when there's meat on the table, she only eats that.”

“Fufufu, then let's try a trick to make sure she eats her vegetables.”

The same was true for Kiriha. Once Harumi had left, her expressions became

more natural and rich. There were only a few people on the surface she could talk to without hiding her true self. You could say it was only the residents of room 106. She couldn't show weakness to her subordinates, and she couldn't be honest with the surface dwellers. Oddly enough, she might only have been able to show her true self to Koutarou and the others because they were her “rivals.”

“Onee-chan!”

And there was one more that Kiriha could show her true self to. That was the children. They were one of the few that Kiriha could show her true face to, thanks to their innocence.

“Today's Harukaze-man was amazing!!”

“Thank you. I'm glad you liked it.”

“Yeah!”

Kiriha squatted and patted the girl running towards her on the head. She was the greengrocer[1] working in this mall's only child. Her father was part of the youth department and had met Kiriha through volunteer work. She was also one of the children at the preschool they had performed at today.

“I kept it a secret from everybody! That Kiriha-oneechan is part of the evil secret society!”

“Fufufu, if you tell anyone the truth I'll eat you up.”

“Ahaha, you're so funny!”

The girl and Kiriha talked cheerfully. Seeing that, Koutarou's doubts grew even bigger.

Did this person really come here to invade the surface?

However, the next moment, the girl looked at Koutarou.

“Hey, hey, onee-chan, who is he?”

Because of that, Koutarou stopped his train of thought and squatted down next to Kiriha and smiled at the girl.

“Now, who might I be?”

“Onee-chan's boyfriend?”

“Do I look like it?”

“You don't!!”

The girl smiled and declared that, then she began laughing. Meanwhile, Kiriha glanced over at Koutarou and made a mischievous smile.

“However, he really is my boyfriend.”

Kiriha grabbed Koutarou's arm and rested her head on his shoulder. As she did, the smell of fresh flowers tickled Koutarou's nose. It was a distinct smell of the scented oil Kiriha used on her hair.

“Really!?”

The girl, though young, was still a girl and the mere mention of the word boyfriend made her eyes sparkle. And Koutarou, who had caught on from Kiriha's smile, calmly nodded at the girl.

“It's true. Amazing, isn't it?”

“Yeah! Onee-chan’s compromising is amazing!”

“Compromising!?”

As Koutarou was stunned, the girl nodded.

“Onee-chan is this beautiful, so why did you compromise with this uncool onii-chan!? Is this volunteer work too!?”

“You've got a good head on you...”

Koutarou smiled wryly from the girl’s harsh appraisal and patted her on the head. Kiriha, who evidently looked happy, cleared her throat.

“Fufu, it's neither compromising or volunteering. Once you become an adult you'll understand.”

“You sure are an adult, onee-chan.”

“At least somewhat more than you.”

Kiriha patted the girl with a smile as she stood up. Since Kiriha was still holding onto Koutarou's arm, he naturally got up as well.

“Well then.”

“Are you shopping, onee-chan?”

The girl scratched her head. Kiriha nodded at the girl and pointed towards the mall with her free hand.

“Yes. We need to buy ingredients for dinner.”

“Hmm. Then come buy something at us! We'll give you a bargain!”

“That's what I planned on doing.”

“Alright! Then hurry up you two! Our limited time sale is about to start!”

“You really have a good head on you...”

The girl then pulled on Koutarou and Kiriha's hands, leading them into the mall.

Part 4

As of late, it had been Kiriha and Ruth's job to do the shopping, so it had been a while since Koutarou last went shopping with Kiriha.

“Oh, Kiriha-chan, you brought your boyfriend with you this time!?”

“Kiriha-san, we just stocked some nice tea. If you don't mind samples, take some with you.”

“Today's hero show was great!”

“Don't look at her like that dear! Sorry about that, Kiriha-san.”

“That's right! Let those young ones that came with you on the volunteer work know that I’m looking forward to working with them again!”

As Koutarou walked alongside Kiriha, various people called out to her. When he had gone with her shopping in the past, he hadn't seen these kinds of reactions.

“Thank you very much.”

Kiriha bowed politely to each and everyone. It looked to Koutarou like Kiriha welcomed this change as well.

Hmm...

Koutarou watched over her, with a mysterious feeling brewing inside.

The people calling out to her were proof that she was blending in well on the surface. Thanks to her participation in the area, she became more and more needed. If things continued like this, Kiriha might someday reveal her true intentions to them.

Kiriha had called it her method of invasion. However, Koutarou tried nothing

to stop her invasion. No, more importantly, he was doubting whether or not this was even an invasion.

Does she really intend to invade the surface?

Koutarou's doubts resurfaced.

It only looked to him like Kiriha was peacefully emigrating to the surface. For that reason, Kiriha legally obtained a dwelling, bonded with the locals and formed harmonious relationships with others.

However, when they had first met, she neglected to mention that and instead hinted about an invasion through force; that she would secure their shrine and mass produce weapons like her haniwas. That's why Koutarou had objected to begin with. If she had told him this is what she was planning from the start, he might even have cooperated with her.

And I'm not even sure if she actually wants that shrine or not...

The biggest doubt in Koutarou's mind was that Kiriha hadn't seized room 106 yet.

Kiriha was smart enough to easily outwit Koutarou. There probably weren't any girls as clever as her around. If that girl put her mind to it, she should be able to wrap up the fighting for room 106 in an instant. It was probably easy for her to roll over Koutarou, Sanae and Yurika, and since Theia was simplistic in her approach, there were plenty of ways to take advantage of her. Whether if she would fight fair and square or scheme her way through it, Koutarou felt it odd for her not to have been victorious yet.

Kiriha was for some reason not taking it seriously. In fact, she would even help Koutarou and the others. That was the case when Sanae had been captured by the ghost hunters or when Theia had been attacked by Clan. Kiriha had said that she knew the pain of having something stolen from you, but not only did she assist her enemies, she even went out of her way to help them.

“I was just about to throw away the unsold stuff. Feel free to take it with you.”

“Thank you very much.”

“Rather than throwing it away, I'd prefer it if a beautiful girl like yourself ate it! See you later, miss!”

“Koutarou, I got some takoyaki. But we still haven't had dinner, so could you eat half of it?”

“Yeah, thank you, Kiriha-san.”

Kiriha smiled and presented the paper plate full of takoyaki she had just gotten to Koutarou. He accepted it and thought to himself.

She really doesn't have any intentions of invading the surface...

What made Koutarou doubt more than anything was her smile. He couldn't imagine the smile she was showing the children and the people working at the mall as being fake. So he couldn't see Kiriha attack them with weapons.

“...Hey, Kiriha-san.”

“Yes, Koutarou?”

Koutarou decided to ask her. If he seriously asked her, she would definitely answer. During these eight months, Koutarou's trust in Kiriha had grown enough for him to believe that.

“There's something that's been bothering me, do you mind if I ask?”

Kiriha, who was walking next to Koutarou, stuffed her mouth with takoyaki. When she looked up at Koutarou, her smile was abruptly erased.

“...That depends on what, but I'll answer as much as I can.”

Since she was sensitive to other people's feelings, she noticed that Koutarou was about to ask something serious.

“I see. Then I'll ask but...”

Koutarou showed a serious expression.

“...You never really intended to invade the surface from the beginning, right?”

“Kou—”

Surprised, Kiriha wasn't even able to say Koutarou's name. Her eyes were then stood wide open for a while before she slowly began smiling.

“...That's quite the thing to say all of a sudden, Koutarou. To say that I don't wish to invade the surface...”

As Kiriha said that, she reached into her pocket with her white, supple hand.

“You don't really wish for it, right?”

“What makes you think that?”

Kiriha pulled her hand out from her pocket, holding a small card. The card was aged and torn; it was a metallic card that looked like it was an extra that came with candy.

If I'm not mistaken, that's the card I saw at the beach...

Koutarou responded to Kiriha's question while staring at the card she had pulled out.

“You're far too nice to invade us.”

Kiriha was nice. She was nice to anyone. She would try to hide it using words, but in the end she wouldn't hurt others.

“...!?”

Kiriha was speechless. And after glancing at the card in her hand she stared at Koutarou.

“...What makes you think that I'm not just acting that way to earn your trust?”

Kiriha then laughed. However, Koutarou could see the feelings he had never

seen before deep inside of her eyes. He couldn't imagine what kind of feelings those eyes held, but he answered her question without hesitation.

“I feel like I've been fooled by those words several times before. You would say that from time to time to scare me off. I'm an idiot, so I kept falling for it.”

Koutarou smiled wryly.

“...Could it be that it would be bad for you to earn my trust?”

Koutarou didn't have any reason to believe what he had said. He wasn't that clever. Instead, those words came from his intuition. But it was an intuition based on his observations of Kiriha these past eight months. Koutarou believed in his own intuition.

“...”

Kiriha's expression vanished and she didn't answer Koutarou's words. While silent, she stared at her card for a while. Koutarou didn't try forcing an answer out of her either. The two of them then continued walking silently.

“Koutarou.”

Once they passed by the arcade and the stars above them had appeared. She finally opened her mouth.

“What?”

“Can I have some of your time the next time you're free?”

Countless stars twinkled in the beautiful winter sky.

“...There's a place I'd like to show you.”

Lit up by those stars, Kiriha's smile shone.

Translator's Notes and References

1. Someone who makes a living selling vegetables and fruits

Recollection (Part 1)

Part 1

Saturday, December 19

Today was blessed with clear weather and no wind. Thanks to that, it felt warm, despite it being winter. It was an indian summer[1].

“Koutarou, what about your coat?”

“I don't need it. It's hard to move in, and besides, it's warm today.”

Because of that, Koutarou shook his head at Kiriha who had her hand on his coat. He then picked up a nearby jacket. He was planning on going out in some more comfortable clothes.

“I see. Then I'll do the same.”

As she helped Koutarou put on his jacket, Kiriha smiled gently.

Today was Saturday, and school was closed. Because of their previous promise, Koutarou and Kiriha would be going out together.

Five pair of eyes stared at Koutarou and Kiriha. They belonged to Sanae, Yurika, Theia and Ruth, and Shizuka who had come over to play.

Sanae, Yurika and Theia sat in front of the TV playing games. However, they weren't focused on the game, but rather on Koutarou and Kiriha. They would glance at the two from time to time.

Ruth and Shizuka sat down facing each other, drinking tea by the tea table. However, Ruth seemed to be in a bad mood, and her cheeks were slightly puffed up. In contrast, Shizuka was in a great mood. Her eyes were sparkling as she pretended to drink tea and stared at Koutarou and Kiriha.

“Alright. Then let's go, Kiriha-san.”

“Yes. Well then everyone, we'll be going out.”

Having finished their preparations, Koutarou and Kiriha moved towards the front door. However, none of the remaining five moved. Normally, Sanae would have made a fuss and ask to come with, but instead was still sitting in front of the TV.

“Kiriha-san, do you need the shoehorn?”

“Thank you. Fufufu, Koutarou, the area around your heel has collapsed.”

“That's why I won't need the shoe horn.”

However, once they had confirmed that Koutarou and Kiriha had reached the front door, all five girls began moving at once. They gathered around the hall leading to the front door and stared at the two by the front door. Their heads peeked around the corner, above one another. From the top it was Sanae, Shizuka, Yurika, Ruth and finally Theia. They looked almost like a totem pole.

“Koutarou, you haven't forgotten anything have you?”

“You gave me my cell phone, handkerchief and wallet yourself just a moment ago.”

“Right, my bad. It was just a habit.”

“I feel like you're telling me I'm unreliable in a roundabout way.”

What entered the group of five’s vision was the sight of Koutarou and Kiriha getting along. Seeing that, four of the five glared at them.

The next moment, all five hurriedly pulled their heads back. That was because Koutarou put his hand on the door.

“I'm off!”

“See you later.”

Koutarou and Kiriha turned around and said goodbye to the five girls. If they hadn't pulled their heads back when they did, they would have been noticed.

“Goodbye.”

The five girls spoke in harmony. Koutarou and Kiriha then turned their backs to the room. If they had listened more carefully, they would have noticed that the five girls sounded a bit obvious.

“...”

Their heads then appeared in the same totem pole fashion. They stared at Koutarou and Kiriha's backs as they left the room.

The 25-year-old door creaked as it shut. With their view obstructed, the five girls lost sight of Koutarou and Kiriha. However, they remained motionless for a moment.

“...That's a date, there's no mistake about it!”

The first one to speak was Shizuka, the only one smiling of the five. Since she was a girl of age, she had an interest in this kind of thing, and she didn't even try to hide it. Her eyes were sparkling with excitement.

“When did they get so close!? I really want to know!!”

“I won't forgive him for this betrayal when he has Sakuraba-senpai! This is a betrayal towards Sakuraba-senpai and I!”

Just below Shizuka, Yurika was shaking with anger. The gentle Yurika was unusually angry as she clenched her fists.

“He's going on a date with the wrong person! Satomi-san should be going out to play with Sakuraba-senpai and me!”

Yurika felt that if Koutarou was to date someone, it should be Harumi. However for some reason, when Yurika imagined Koutarou and Harumi on a date, she was with them for some reason. Yurika failed to notice that, and didn't understand half of the reason for why she was so angry.

“Koutarou, you stupid idiot!! Why can't you notice that it's all part of that woman's trap!”

Sanae was also angry that Koutarou had gone out with Kiriha, but the reason for that was that she simply worried about his safety. She was worried that Koutarou had fallen for her temptations.

“Now that it's come to this I'll have to reveal that woman's true colors and protect Koutarou!”

The reason Sanae hadn't gone with Koutarou was because if she had, Kiriha wouldn't have shown her true colors. She didn't want to avert this disaster but solve the problem once and for all.

“Ruth, can you track them?”

“I already am. I'm tracking them with the Blue Knight's firearm control system.”

The two bottom heads of the totem pole had already swung into action. They were using the Blue Knight's monitoring system to follow after Koutarou and Kiriha.

“What's their current location?”

“They've left Corona House and are heading east. I believe they're heading towards the station.”

Theia, who normally went overboard, aside, this time Ruth was just as eager. Normally, she would say it's an invasion of privacy and prevent Theia from doing anything rash, but this time was different.

“Her highness's knight is meeting with a woman in secret... This kind of scandal cannot be allowed!”

Ruth's eyes were bloodshot and she gave command after command to the Blue Knight.

Koutarou had to be Theia's knight. He had to be a noble, strong, just and true hero. Of course, problems with women would get in the way of that. To Ruth, the most important thing was setting Koutarou back on the right path. For his

sake, privacy was hardly a problem.

“Cursed Koutarou, collaboration with the enemy is a serious crime!! Does he even understand!?”

Theia said that, but in reality she didn't think that Koutarou was collaborating with the enemy. He wasn't that kind of man, Theia knew that more anyone.

You're acting too much like a knight! Disregard some people's unhappiness once in a while!

That was Theia's hunch. A while before, she vaguely felt that Kiriha was wrestling with some kind of problem. At the same time, that Koutarou was getting involved with her.

If Kiriha had a problem, Koutarou would never just ignore it. That was her hunch as a princess, and her desire as a woman.

“The fool! He really is a fool!”

Worry and a bit of jealousy tugged at Theia's heart. However, above all else, she was happy with his willingness to help.

“Koutarou and Kiriha are heading towards the station, right? They must be planning on jumping on a train and going somewhere!”

“Taking the train from here, you'd either get to the city or the beach. Which way are they going I wonder?”

If they were planning on shopping, bowling or any other city-centered entertainment, the fastest way would be to cut through the prefecture.

On the other hand, if they headed towards the sea, there were various sea-side resorts and large-scale entertainment venues. Since it was now winter, it was unlikely that they were heading for a sea-side resort, but there was still the chance that they were heading towards the aquarium or amusement park.

Because of that, based on what train they took, they would be able to narrow down Koutarou's and Kiriha's destination.

“Nothing will come from waiting here! Let's head for the station!”

“Here we go!”

“W-Wait for meee!”

Theia dashed out of the room. Sanae quickly followed suit. Yurika panicked and followed behind them.

“Then I shall go too.”

Ruth hurriedly stood up and headed towards the entrance. She had to give Theia backup.

“...Good bye.”

Shizuka stared at Ruth's back and spoke those parting words. She sighed and her tone of voice sounded sad. Hearing that, Ruth stopped moving after she had put her hand on the door frame.

“Aren't you coming along, Shizuka-sama?”

“Well, I have that part-time job.”

“Ah, you did mention that you would be helping out at a show again.”

Shizuka was also interested in Koutarou and Kiriha, and she wanted to join the pursuit party by any means. However, since she had the part-time job she had been offered last week, she couldn't do that. She was going to work this weekend. So she had to get ready to go to her part-time job in a while.

“Aaah, if I knew this was going to happen I wouldn't have accepted that job!”

Shizuka was mortifyingly grinding her teeth. In response, Ruth smiled wryly.

“I'll report what happened to you afterwards.”

“Really?”

“Yes, leave it to me.”

Ruth smiled at Shizuka as she sighed.

“Ruth, what are you doing?”

“Yes, right away!... Very well then, Shizuka-sama, I will take my leave.”

And with that, Theia and the party left Shizuka behind and exited room 106 to chase after Koutarou and Kiriha.

Part 2

Koutarou and Kiriha had gotten on the train headed towards the sea. Seeing that, Theia and the others got on the following express train to chase after them. Because of that, Theia and the others had arrived at the station they assumed Koutarou and Kiriha were going to get off of ahead of time.

“Your highness, as we expected, Satomi-sama and Kiriha-sama got off on this station.”

“I thought so...”

Hearing Ruth's report, Theia nodded.

“This is a definitely a date.”

“Grrrrr, if we don't do something fast, Koutarou will fall prey to Kiriha!”

Theia, Ruth, Yurika and Sanae hid in a small alley while keeping an eye on the entrance to the station.

“However, the two of them entered a paid area with a roof, so the unmanned aircraft lost track of them.”

While the four of them were moving, they had an unmanned aircraft from the Blue Knight follow Koutarou and Kiriha from above. However, since Koutarou and Kiriha entered a paid area with a roof after getting off the train, it became impossible to track them from the sky.

“No problems. They'll have to leave eventually.”

“But, with that many people how can we spot Satomi-san?”

Yurika pointed her finger at an endless crowd. Since it was the weekend, there were a lot of people out to play. Even if Koutarou and Kiriha appeared, they wouldn't see them in this crowd.

“Fufufu, leave this to Sanae-chan!”

That was when Sanae stepped forward, full of confidence. She stood in front of everyone and squinted with her eyes.

“There's a special bond between I, Sanae-chan, and Koutarou!”

Sanae was looking for the spiritual energy that Koutarou was emitting. Since she always clung onto him, she was especially sensitive to his aura. Thanks to that, Sanae was able to find Koutarou and Kiriha without any problems.

“I found them, they're over there!”

“Ruth!”

“I've got a lock on them! The unmanned aircraft is following them again!”

Thanks to Sanae, the unmanned aircraft began chasing after Koutarou and Kiriha once more. With this, Theia and the others would no longer lose Koutarou and Kiriha.

“Sanae-chan, that's amazing.”

“Praise me some more you bastard♪”

Sanae boasted proudly as Yurika praised her. However, she didn't get patted on the head like with Koutarou so she didn't feel as fulfilled.

“Satomi-sama and Kiriha-sama have begun moving.”

“Where are they headed?”

“...According to the map, there's a zoo in the direction they're heading to.”

Once Koutarou and Kiriha got out of the station, they began moving straight forward. In the direction they were heading to was the Harukaze Zoo. It was the largest zoo in the prefecture.

By the way, to the right of it there was an amusement park, and to the left was an aquarium. This area was so crowded because all of those attractions were so tightly grouped up.

“Alright, let's keep a safe distance and follow them.”

“Don't we need to get a little closer?”

“There's barely anywhere with a roof in the zoo, so we should be fine, right?”

“Ahh!? H-How could this be!?”

As Theia and the others began moving to follow after Koutarou and Kiriha, Ruth let out a loud voice akin to a scream.

“What's wrong!?”

“The two of them are holding hands!!”

In the center of the footage captured by the unmanned aircraft were Koutarou and Kiriha holding hands as they walked.

“Wh-whaaaaaat!?”

“Satomi-san!? Are you serious!?”

“You're being fooled, you're being fooled, Koutarou!!”

In reality, Koutarou and Kiriha were only holding hands so they wouldn't lose each other in this crowd, but to the others, that wasn’t what it looked like.

“We're going to close in! I want to know what they're talking about!”

“Roger!”

“I'm glad we followed them... I never imagined it would turn out like this...”

“Once we get home he'll be punished. This behavior is shameful and unworthy of a knight.”

Having splendidly misunderstood Koutarou and Kiriha's relationship, the four girls hurriedly chased after the two.

Although there was a large crowd on the outside, once they got inside the zoo, the crowd began to disperse, so there was no longer any risk of losing sight of each other. Koutarou and Kiriha let go of each other’s hands.

“Koutarou, there's a giraffe over there.”

“Ah, hey.”

And because Kiriha headed off on her own, there wasn't even a chance to hold hands.

“...What's up with her today?”

Following after Kiriha, Koutarou scratched his head.

Normally Kiriha gave off the appearance of being a mature. She was the most mature of the residents of room 106.

“Koutarou, is it true that giraffes sleep standing up?”

“Supposedly. I hear they have no problems with sleeping while standing up for a short moment.”

“I see, so it's true.”

However, as she stared at the animals, she had none of that mature appeal. In fact, it was the opposite; at the moment, she seemed like an innocent child.

The answer to that question might be around here...

When Koutarou had asked about Kiriha's intentions regarding the surface invasion, she had said there was some place she wanted to go with him. And here, she showed a different side of herself that she hadn't showed before. Koutarou didn't imagine that this was irrelevant to that.

“Koutarou, where are the penguins?”

“The penguins should be at the aquarium.”

She had an honest smile, her eyes jumped back and forth looking at unusual animals, she spoke quicker than normal and she was clasping her hands like a child.

I guess I'll play along for a while...

Seeing Kiriha like that, Koutarou was overcome with a feeling of gentleness. He wanted to let her do as she pleased.

“Even though the flamingos are here?”

“Even then, they're still in the aquarium. The polar bears should be at the aquarium as well.”

“I see... their classifications are surprisingly vague...”

“Do you want to go the aquarium later?”

“Please! I want to go by all means!”

This was the first time Koutarou felt like Kiriha was from the same era as he was.

Part 3

“I see, so this is how it tastes.”

Kiriha had a satisfied look on her face as she bit down on her red candied apple. Next to her sat Koutarou. The two of them were sitting on a bench, eating lunch.

“Is this your first time?”

Koutarou stopped eating his yakisoba and looked at Kiriha. She nodded in response as she munched on the candied apple.

“Yes, this is my first time eating one. I saw them once in the past, and ever since then I've been interested in trying one.”

Koutarou and Kiriha were in a resting area located in one of the corners of the zoo. In that place, there were snack shops, stalls and candy shops lined up, giving off the aura of a festival being held. They had bought the candied apple Kiriha was eating there.

“Hmm. So how is it? Is it as good as you thought? Or was it bad?”

“If it's just one, it's delicious.”

“Hahaha, that's true for most stall foods.”

“That yakisoba too?”

Kiriha looked at what Koutarou was holding as he laughed.

“Yeah. Want a taste?”

“Please, I'm quite interested.”

Kiriha had an interested look on her face as she received Koutarou's chopsticks and carried the yakisoba to her mouth. After chewing on it for a while, she looked back at Koutarou.

“...It's persistent and greasy. It's not very good.”

“Yeah. You can't eat too much of this.”

“Fufufu, I think I can understand.”

The yakisoba had been altered in order to make it cool slower, and so that the taste would remain unchanged even if it did get cold. Because of the large amount of grease and having been cooked in a lower temperature, the yakisoba rarely got dry, and because of the grease the taste got thicker. It was fundamentally different from yakisoba that had been made to be eaten when it was the most delicious.

Because of that, the fate of this kind of food was that you wouldn't be able to eat much of it.

“So it's only meant to be eaten at special times.”

Kiriha smiled and went back to eating her candied apple again. Meanwhile, Koutarou nodded and carried some noodles to his mouth.

“Thaht's rhight.”

“Mind your manners, Koutarou.”

“Ith's fhine at thimes like this.”

Kiriha took a bite of her candied apple.

“Fufufu, thath's thrue.”

As Koutarou and Kiriha were laughing-

“I found you, underground people!”

A familiar sounding manly voice echoed throughout the surroundings.

“What?”

“Koutarou, over there.”

Koutarou looked up from his yakisoba and in front of him was a lone man wearing a red outfit.

“Fate brought us together here today! This time—”

The man in red was in the middle of his speech, but he stopped half way through.

“Wait a minute, isn't that guy...”

“Oh? You're from that time...”

Through the visor of the man's helmet, Koutarou and the man's eyes met, and the two spoke at the same time.

“Baron Demon-san and Black Rose-san?”

“You're the Sun Ranger, right?”

It was the Sun Squad, Sun Rangers, the five-man hero group Koutarou and the others met at the Harukaze-man hero show last week.

“I am terribly sorry for intruding on your hero show last weekend!”

After noticing Koutarou, Red Shine bowed deeply. Remembering that he had angered Koutarou on top of the stage, Red Shine used this chance to apologize.

“No, no, you were hardly intruding.”

Because of the man's gentlemanly and proper apology, Koutarou and Kiriha hurriedly stood up and bowed their heads.

“At that time, Harukaze-man had gotten in some trouble, so it really helped that you appeared to help buy some time. Thank you.”

“It helps hearing that. I'm still very sorry for leaving without saying anything that time.”

Having both been raised to respect their superiors, Koutarou and Red Shine connected and smiled at each other.

“By the way, Baron-san, Black Rose-san, based on your appearance, are you enjoying some private time?”

“Yes. We wanted to talk some things out.”

Koutarou and Kiriha were wearing casual clothes. Seeing that, Red Shine assumed that they had come to the zoo to play.

“And are you in the middle of work?”

“Hahaha, I'm afraid so.”

Red Shine was wearing his red suit. Seeing that, Koutarou assumed they were holding a hero show in the zoo.

“But it seems this sortie was for naught.”

Red Shine smiled wryly as he shook and hit a small device that looked like a handheld console.

“I see.”

So that show wasn't a hit...

That was how Koutarou interpreted what Red Shine was saying. That they had held a hero show in the zoo, but the reaction had been cold.

“Well, if underground people really were to appear that would be a problem too, Ahahaha!”

“That's just how it is for heroes.”

Red Shine and Koutarou laughed together. Their conversation wasn't quite matching up, but neither of them noticed that.

Did he say underground people? And that device... last week that group mentioned underground people as well, could it be...

Only Kiriha realized what Red Shine had said.

“Kenichi!

“Kenichi-kun!”

Two more Sun Rangers appeared from behind an animal’s cage: a woman and a fat man. Koutarou remembered seeing those two as well.

“Oh!? They've...!!”

Seeing those two, Koutarou's eyes began sparkling.

“Hey, Red Shine!”

“That's right, Baron-san!”

Red Shine boasted proudly as he saw Koutarou getting excited.

“Pink and Yellow! They've gotten different colors!”

The two Sun Rangers running towards them were, unlike last time, not Red Shine. Their suits were Pink and Yellow respectively.

“So you can do it if you try, Sun Rangers!”

Getting excited, Koutarou forgot his manners and began acting similar to Baron Demon's character as he slapped Red Shine on the back.

“Yes! We took what you had said into account and had gotten different colors to make it easier for the kids to tell us apart!”

Pink for the girl, yellow for the curry lover. Their colors fit their personalities perfectly.

“That's right, that's the idea! Now I'm sorry for those harsh words last week, Sun Rangers!”

“No, this is all thanks to your guidance, Baron-san.”

“Damn, I wish I had my outfit too!”

This is it! This is how heroes should be!

Compared to last week, their heroism had grown exponentially, and Koutarou got even more excited.

“Wait, no way!? Daisaku-kun, isn't that Baron-sama!?”

“Looks like it... Oh? Is that girl next to him holding some yakisoba? I want to eat some too...”

The next moment, Pink and Yellow noticed Koutarou and Kiriha and sped towards them.

“Baron-sama! No long time no see!”

“Kenichi! Kenichi!”

Pink ran towards Koutarou at full speed, while Yellow ran up to Red. The two of them then began speaking in between rough breaths.

“Look, Baron-sama!! I've gotten cuter, right!?”

“Gwahahaha, you've gotten more heroic, Pink Shine. However, all that's changed is your appearance. Without your allies, you will only fall prey to my powers.”

She spun around in front of Koutarou and showed off her suit. Seeing that, Koutarou complimented her in a fashion similar to that of a villain’s.

“How wonderful! I'm prepared for anything you'll do to me!”

Pink's pupils turned into hearts and she wiggled her body. Normally, Yellow would tell her to not be so shameless but he was too occupied to notice her.

“Kenichi! I want to eat yakisoba too!”

“Yakisoba?”

“Yeah! That girl is holding some, right? They must be selling it around here somewhere!”

Yellow pressed against Red as he pointed towards the yakisoba that Kiriha was holding. Red answered Yellow while pushing back his gigantic body.

“C-Calm down, Daisaku! There doesn't seem to be any enemies here, so you can go buy some!”

“Really!?”

Hearing those words, Yellow moved away from Red and began searching through the area around him. He was looking for the stalls that were selling

yakisoba.

“Hah... geez...”

With Yellow backing off, Red dropped his shoulders in relief. Yellow's hand appeared in front of him while Yellow still scanned through the area.

“The wallet, the wallet!”

“Here.”

“I'll see you later!”

“Don't forget the receipt!”

After receiving the wallet that Red pulled out from his pocket, Yellow ran off to a nearby snack shop.

“What a troublesome bunch...”

Red couldn't hide his uneasiness as he looked at Pink wiggling her body in front of Koutarou and Yellow who disappeared into the snack shop.

“Oh well, there doesn't seem to be any enemies anyways...”

“Nii-chan, is it true that there are no enemies?”

“Oh, Kotarou.”

While Red was sighing and rubbing his shoulders, the fourth Sun Ranger came over. The suit he was wearing was green. Although he didn't stand out because of his short height and green color, he himself had wanted that color, because to him, not standing out was safer.

“So about there not being any enemies-”

“That's right. I came all this way chasing a reaction on the detector, but there's no underground people to be seen here. As you can see, it's the very definition of peaceful.”

“You're right. The reaction is pointing to somewhere around here, but there

only seems to be guests in the zoo around.”

Green Shine pulled out his own handheld console looking device and looked at its screen, while scratching his head. It was indeed showing a reaction to the machines the underground people used, but the enemies they were looking for was nowhere to be seen.

“Surprisingly, the only ones I found were Baron Demon-san and Black Rose-san. They have today off and came to play.”

The only ones at the location the detector had reacted to were different families and Koutarou and Kiriha that they had met the other week.

So they really are...

Staring at Red and Green, Kiriha understood the situation.

This Sun Squad, Run Rangers were not staging hero shows for children, they were in fact a real battle squad. On top of that, they were working to prevent a surface invasion by the underground people. It also seemed like they had a device capable of detecting the technology the underground people used.

Maybe I should try them now...

Kiriha's expression returned to that of a leader of the People of the Earth, and made a swift decision. She looked down slightly, hiding her face from the Sun Rangers and whispered.

“Karama, Korama, Class II stealth mode.”

“Ho-! Understood Ho-!”

“Roger!”

As she whispered, she got a response from Karama and Korama, who were hiding, right away. They whispered loud enough so that only Kiriha could hear.

Normally what Karama and Korama were using to hide was a function called

Class I stealth mode. This hid electromagnetic radiation and visible light, making them invisible to radar and the human eye.

Compared to that, the Class II stealth mode that Kiriha ordered them to use not only did the above but also hid their spiritual energy. By doing that, the haniwas blocked the spiritual energy the generator was emitting and could no longer be tracked by spiritual energy sensors. Normally, this function was only required when dealing with other People of the Earth, so she's never had the chance to use it until now. And in this state, Karama and Korama's performance dropped dramatically, to about 10% of what they were using while in Class I stealth mode.

“Ah, it vanished, nii-chan.”

“Same here.”

At the same time Karama and Korama changed their stealth mod, the reaction on the screens Red and Green were looking at also vanished.

“I'm starting to doubt this device is actually working.”

“It was suspicious from the start.”

As I thought, they're detecting spiritual energy. Did our technology leak to them for some reason? No, the accuracy of the detector is too poor for that. Either they produced their own spiritual energy technology or they analyze and reproduced ours...

Based on Red's and Green's reactions, Kiriha could imagine what had happened. The technology they were using was still far away from the level Kiriha and the underground people had. Even though this was Class II stealth mode, being unable to detect Karama and Korama from this close, that was obvious. Regardless of whether they developed the technology on their own or if they had analyzed and reproduced it, they were still only taking their first steps into spiritual energy technology.

However, she couldn't let her guard down. If they had analyzed and

reproduced the People of the Earth's technology, this could prove to be problematic. It would mean that the Sun Rangers or another part of the organization had come into contact and engaged in combat with the People of the Earth.

I just hope the radical faction hasn't sped up their movements...

Kiriha was worried the most about the part of the People of the Earth that wanted to invade the surface using force. It wouldn't be strange for them to have appeared and fought on the surface. And using that presumption, the worst case scenario would be that their technology had been leaked to the surface side. If they had been marked by the surface dwellers as enemies, and their technology had begun leaking to the surface, Kiriha's peaceful invasion plan was at risk of being ruined.

“Oh yeah, where's Hayato?”

“He's still not here? He left chasing after the reaction before I did.”

No, I'm just overthinking it... I've been a bit too suspicious lately...

In the end, Kiriha decided that she was worrying too much. Seeing how casual the Sun Rangers were acting, she didn't think they felt all that much danger.

“Sorry for keeping you waiting! Kenichiii!”

At that moment, a manly voice rang out from above Koutarou and the others. It was a cool and deep voice, coming from on top of a nearby cage.

“Hayato-niichan climbed up someplace like that...”

“That idiot, what's he doing over there...?”

On top of that cage stood was a lone person.

“Is he one of your friends?”

“That's right, Baron-sama♪ Hayato loves to stand out♪”

Koutarou couldn't really make it out because of the position of the sun, but based on the silhouette, he was almost certain it was a Sun Ranger.

“Haaa!”

That person jumped and flew towards Koutarou and the others. Thanks to the amazing help of the suit, he jumped close to ten meters in an instant and landed in front of Koutarou. On top of that, his posture wasn't ruined by his landing whatsoever.

“The heaven calls! The earth calls! The people calls! They all call for me to protect the planet!”

He then swung his arm around and posed.

“I am the son of the Sun! I am flame incarnate!”

He thrusted his hands overhead as if to grasp the sun. He must have practiced it countless times. His appearance was manly and powerful.

“Reeeeed Shiiiiiiiine!!”

At the same time as his shout, his red suit shone in the sun.

“Quit messing around!!”

However, Koutarou's axe kick was far more powerful than his pose.

“Agh, ugh.”

Receiving Koutarou's powerful blow, the second Red Shine was thrown to the concrete ground of the zoo. Because of the all too powerful kick, the second Red Shine rebounded and turned around before landing on his back.

“O-Ow, just what... why...”

“No what’s or why’s! Damnit, it was going so well too, why would you ruin it at the end!?”

“Eh!? Baron-san!?”

“Don't give me an 'Eh!? Baron-san!?'!! Do you understand what you just did you bastard!?”

Because of Koutarou's shout, the second Red Shine finally noticed him. And while flinching from Koutarou's attitude, he gets up and desperately tried to protest.

“Just wait a moment! Why are you so angry, Baron-san!? We colored ourselves after our roles!”

“Then why are there two Reds!?”

“Please, calm down, Baron-san!!”

Still overly excited, Koutarou was about to axe kick the second Red Shine once more, so the first Red Shine hurriedly stopped him.

In reality, another commotion was occurring behind Koutarou's back.

“That ferocious sound voice!! Power that would be unstoppable unless wearing this suit!! Those evil looking eyes on fire!! Kyaaaan, I want to be scorched by that glare!!”

“Calm down, Megumi-neechan!”

Seeing Koutarou burning with rage, Pink Shine's excitement exceeded its limit. Green Shine desperately stopped her from unsteadily walking towards Koutarou. If Pink Shine got involved in this, she would only fan the flames of Koutarou's anger.

“Daisaku-niichan, help me stop nee-chan!!”

As his last remaining hope, Green asked Yellow for help.

“Hm? Just wait a while longer until I finish eating this yakisoba, Kotarou-kun.”

“Baron-sama, your Pink is over here!”

“W-What can I even do!!”

However, reality is cruel. No one came to back up Green as he desperately tried all he could. Pink dragged Green with her as she gradually approached Koutarou.

This is bad! Baron-san is going to kill us!

Green looked forward towards Koutarou who was enraged as usual.

“Are you doing this on purpose!? Is it that fun making me this mad!?”

“You're wrong! That's not what we're trying to do! Please calm down!”

“As if I could calm down!!”

“We still haven't officially decided on who's the leader!! So we decided to keep the two candidates in red!!”

“Quit messing around!! There's only one leader!! The only time when there would ever be two leaders would be in the movies or around episode 26 when the leader changes!!”

“S-So that really was the case...”

“What was that!? Did you do this on purpose!?”

“Oh crap!!”

“You idiot, Hayato!! You had to say something stupid!”

“Baaaron-samaaa~! Please mess me up with your power fist!”

“Uwah, it's no useee~!!”

“...This yakisoba is delicious. I'll get one more on our way home.”

Since they were a government sponsored battle squad, the Sun Squad, Sun Rangers were strong. They were trained, and their suits were durable and powerful.

“Dieeeeee! Pay for you sins with your deaths!!”

However, the enraged Koutarou was even stronger than all five of them

combined.

Translator's Notes and References

1. Refers to unseasonably warm weather

Recollection (Part 2)

Part 1

Sunday, December 20

Sunday, the following day. Koutarou and Kiriha were riding the same train as yesterday. Their destination this time was the amusement park. Koutarou was tagging along with Kiriha today as well.

“Damn those Sun Rangers... yesterday was a mess...”

Koutarou's expression distorted as the zoo comes into view. The zoo was still far away, but as he got closer, he remembered the Sun Rangers from yesterday, and his mood got worse.

“I'm sorry, Koutarou.”

Kiriha smiled wryly and apologized to Koutarou with an apologetic look on her face.

In truth, they were supposed to visit the amusement park yesterday. However, because of the trouble with the Sun Rangers, they ran out of time. That was why Kiriha was apologizing.

“Kiriha-san, there's no need for you to apologize. They're the ones at fault.”

“That might be true. But... I'm sorry, Koutarou.”

Kiriha's hair fluttered slightly as she tilted her head, and her smile changed. It was a happy smile, rather than an apologetic one.

“...You're quite the woman you know...”

Her smile changed and her head tilted slightly. The words she was saying were the same, but all negative emotions left Koutarou, and he returned to his cheerful self.

“I'll take that as a compliment.”

“Please do.”

This time Koutarou smiled wryly.

This would happen from time to time. Kiriha's rare, refreshing smile. Up until now, Koutarou had always tried to ignore those smiles, to keep himself from being fooled. However, he didn't think she was trying to fool him now. So her smile sunk into the deepest parts of him.

You really are quite impressive...

And that's why Koutarou began doubting. He was wondering why Kiriha would purposefully make moves that would make him doubt her. Was she going to reveal her true intentions? If she did, and smiled at Koutarou like that, Koutarou would probably easily obey her.

“You're quite the man too.”

“Is that a compliment?”

“Fufufu, what do you think?”

“You really are quite the woman...”

As Koutarou and Kiriha swayed inside the train, they happily laughed together.

“I found them! They just came through the entrance!”

“Good job, Sanae. Ruth, have the unmanned aircraft continue tracking them.”

“Understood, your highness.”

“I found them too!”

Theia, Ruth, Sanae and Yurika were following after Koutarou and Kiriha today as well. They were waiting by some alley for Koutarou and Kiriha to come out.

“10:10; They begin moving towards the amusement park.”

After giving out commands to the unmanned aircraft, Ruth recorded Koutarou and Kiriha's moves using her armband for Shizuka's sake as she had left for her part-time job. Shizuka wanted to know about Koutarou and Kiriha. However, unlike the other four girls, she was just curious, as a girl of age.

“But it's still suspicious. Both today and yesterday, Satomi-san and Kiriha-san are completely different from normal.”

“Koutarou's definitely being fooled by her sex appeal.”

“Koutarou's an idiot and honest to a fault!”

“There are countless knights that have lost their ways because of woman-related problems. Satomi-sama is lacking in self-awareness!”

Koutarou and Kiriha were cheerfully walking towards the amusement park. However, the four girls secretly watching over them were restless.

Similar to yesterday, Koutarou and Kiriha looked closer than ever. The four girls all had comments about Koutarou's relation with women, so they couldn't remain calm as they watched over them.

“Let's go, your highness.”

“Yes, it would be problematic if we lost sight of them. Let's chase after them right away.”

“Roger!”

“Okay.”

Like yesterday, the four girls followed after Koutarou and Kiriha.

Part 2

The first thing Kiriha did after they had entered the amusement park was to take Koutarou to a small movie theater. They showed various movies related to events, and right now it was being used to campaign a newly started

anime.

“Is still really okay?”

“Yes. This is fine.”

After Koutarou bought tickets and pamphlets, Kiriha happily nodded. She received her pamphlet from Koutarou and stroked the cover. It looked similar to patting a child's head, and Koutarou believed she was feeling nostalgic.

She might really be feeling nostalgic...

Koutarou looked through his own pamphlet. 'The king of beetles, Kabutonga – Theatrical version' was written on it with large letters.

The movie was the theatrical version of an anime that aired ten years ago, and it was being screened again as a promotion for the newly airing work: 'The king of beetles, Kabutonga – Second Impact'. Another event promoting Second Impact was being held in parallel.

Kiriha hadn't said much to Koutarou during the two days he had spent with her, but he had noticed that when she did, she would sometimes mention the terms 'in the past' and 'ten years ago'. So Koutarou began thinking that all the places they had been to these past two days were related to her past.

If that was true, then this movie might be the same. That's the reason behind why Koutarou believed that Kiriha was feeling nostalgic.

“Koutarou, look.”

At that moment, a brand new metallic card was presented to Koutarou.

Kabutonga No. 1 – Japanese Rhinoceros Beetle.

Below those words was a hero, wearing an outfit designed after the beetle, posing. The card was a trading card that could be found as an extra when buying snacks, and it was very popular with the kids at the time. It had been reprinted and added as an extra with the pamphlet.

This is... Kiriha-san’s...

Koutarou remembered seeing that card. The last time he saw it, it wasn't brand-new. It was aged and torn. And it had been scribbled on.

“Kiriha-san, isn't this...”

“Fufufu.”

Kiriha's smile looked bright; innocent, but at the same time, nostalgic. It was the best smile she had shown Koutarou today. Seeing that, Koutarou was convinced.

So that really is the case. Which means...

In Koutarou's mind, Kiriha's behavior these past eight months and the events these past two days lined up in accordance to a certain rule. Just like a jigsaw puzzle, it pointed towards a single answer. However, it wasn't enough to remove Koutarou's doubts. To solve all of his doubts, one more answer was required.

“You're surprisingly feminine.”

That was all Koutarou understood right now.

“That's unexpected. I've been trying to act like a woman all this time though...”

“You're doing it on purpose, aren't you?”

Koutarou lightly tapped Kiriha on the forehead with his fist.

“That hurts, Koutarou. What are you doing, hurting a woman's face...”

Using exaggerated gestures, she put pressure on her forehead and glared at Koutarou. Seeing that, Koutarou sighed.

“Stop fooling around, and let's go. The movie's starting.”

“That would be a problem.”

However, that was just for a moment.

The two of them began smiling right away, and entered the theater filled with children.

“A theater, huh...”

“This is bad.”

“Yes, this is bad. Very bad.”

Seeing Koutarou and Kiriha enter the theater, Sanae and Theia looked at each other with a severe expression and nodded at each other. The two of them had noticed the danger.

“Why? C-Could it be that Satomi-san would take advantage of the darkness to make a move on Kiriha-san!?”

Unaware of the danger, Yurika was worried about something completely unrelated.

“Of course not! There are kids all around them!”

“The problem is not with those two.”

“Then, what is it?”

Yurika had a confused look on her face as she stared at Sanae and Theia. The two of them then looked back at the same time.

“Satomi-sama and Kiriha-sama have entered the theater. Putting the unmanned aircraft on standby above it.”

The two of them looked at Ruth who was giving out commands to the unmanned aircraft. Following their glance, Yurika realized that they were talking about Ruth.

“...It's Ruth?”

However, Yurika didn't understand. She couldn't understand what Koutarou and Kiriha going in to a theater had to do with Ruth. She whispered to Theia

and Sanae so that Ruth wouldn't hear.

“...That's right. Or rather, she has problems with where they went.”

“...Yurika take a good look at the sign by the theater. However, don't raise your voice no matter what you see.”

Theia and Sanae whisper back in response. The two of them were worried that Ruth would notice the sign and had casually moved in front of Ruth to obstruct it.

“The sign?”

Yurika blinked, not understanding what was going on before she looked towards the theater. She then noticed what was written on the sign.

“Hiii!?”

She blocked her own mouth to prevent her scream. However, that might not have been needed because she had been so surprised that she couldn't scream any more than that.

‘A special project to commemorate the broadcasting of “The king of beetles, Kabutonga – Second Impact”, a rescreening of the masterpiece “The king of beetles, Kabutonga – Theatrical version”! Parents and children, please enjoy it together!’

“A-As if anyone could enjoy it!!!”

Since this movie was made ten years ago, it had been produced using hand-drawn animation, unlike the modern anime industry that relied on a lot of CG. Yurika couldn't help but feel hatred coming from the hero's smile. To Yurika, he looked like a demon that had crawled up from hell as he held the metallic beetle carapace used to transform in his hand.

“Ah, idiot, you're too loud!”

“Shhh! Shhh!”

“Hmmp, Mhhhm, Hmmhmm!!”

Theia and Sanae pounced on Yurika as she began making noises. Ruth had constantly been looking through the unmanned aircrafts point of view, so she didn't know what was written on the sign. However, if the commotion continued, she would eventually notice. So Theia and Sanae were desperate.

“...Quit messing around!! Do you understand the situation!?”

“...Hmm Hmm Hmm.”

“...If you make a fuss again, you know what's going to happen, right?”

“...Hmm! Hmm! Hmm!”

Sanae and Theia quietly threatened Yurika, and Yurika hurriedly nodded her head.

The two of them were serious. If their positions had been reversed, Yurika felt like she would have been serious too, so she understood them.

“Is there something wrong?”

Noticing the commotion, Ruth turned around. Having been left out, Ruth looked at the three in confusion. The three of them then hurriedly separated and began covering the sign up.

“I-It's nothing, Ruth! It looked like Yurika had a small pebble on the bottom of her shoe! So I was just thinking of getting it off!”

“Yeah! Right, Yurika!?”

Theia was planning on surviving this situation by pretending that Yurika had run into a minor problem. Sanae quickly picked up on that and joined in.

“Eh? Was that why?”

Yurika, however, misunderstood Theia and looked at the back of her shoes. And of course, she couldn't find any pebbles stuck there.

“I don't see any pe—”

“...Shut up!”

“...There is. In the pattern by the heel.”

“I-Is that so?”

Having received a blow to her head, Yurika looked at Ruth with a questioning look and tears in her eyes. However, before Ruth could say anything else, Theia walked up to her, grabbed her hand and walked in the opposite direction of the theater.

“Let's go, Ruth.”

“Your highness? Are you fine with leaving Satomi-sama and Kiriha-sama?”

Trying to tear Ruth away from the theater, Theia continued walking. At the same time, she put some distance between them and Yurika.

“I don't mind. Just leave the unmanned aircraft on standby until Koutarou comes out. The movie will probably last for over an hour, I don't intend to just sit here wait for that.”

“But what if they do something—”

“That won't happen. Did you forget that they will be surrounded by kids?”

“Now that you mention it...”

“Koutarou might look unreliable, but he won't do anything to ruin the dreams of children.”

“I see, that makes a lot of sense.”

Ruth was bothered about just leaving, but after hearing what Theia had to say she was satisfied and soon walked alongside her.

“...Would you give it a break.”

“I'm sorry, I didn't mean to.”

“If you try to do something like that, I'll possess you and forcibly close your

mouth.”

“Anything but that!!”

Sanae and Yurika followed after Theia and Ruth. Although it might just have been an excuse that Theia came up with on the spot, they couldn't just sit outside the theater for over an hour.

“Hey, everyone, why don't we all go see the haunted mansion since we have the time. I hear it's really scary.”

“I don't really mind.”

“That does sound like fun.”

“I absolutely refuse! I'm always with a ghost, so why would I need to go see a haunted mansion!?”

Having separated from Koutarou and Kiriha, the four girls were all ready to enjoy the amusement park. There were still about two hours left until the movie ended, so they had plenty of time to enjoy.

However, none of them knew.

None of them had any idea what event was being held in front of the haunted mansion.

It was a tragedy they could have avoided if they had paid more attention to the sign by the theater, but since the hurriedly left, they didn't have the time to do so.

Part 3

Meanwhile, Shizuka who had gone alone to her part-time job was standing on a stage wearing a full body suit.

Shizuka's athleticism during last week’s hero show had caught the eyes of a professional and she had been introduced to this part-time job. Of course, it was related to a hero show.

“Poison powder doesn't affect me! Have you forgotten that my body is made out of metal!? Absorbing Madame Butterfly's ability backfired, Scarab King!”

Shizuka moved her body in accordance to the hero's voice flowing out from the speakers.

The acting should be overdone...

Even though she had been told to overact in a play when she was practicing for the Blue Knight's play in November, the hero show required even more over the top acting. Since the helmet covered her face, she had to make even bigger, more dramatic gestures to make it easier to understand.

She pointed powerfully at the large beetle costume in front of her. As if waiting for that cue, the deep voice of a man flowed through the speakers.

“What about it, Kabutonga No. 1!! Even if it doesn't work on you, what about the humans around you!?”

As the voice was sounding out from the speakers, the beetle – Scarab King continued moving his limbs. Moving your body while someone was speaking was one of the important jobs for both heroes and villains during the show.

“Oh no, that was your goal!?”

As she acted as if she was overly surprised, female extras began surrounding her. They were civilians being controlled by Scarab King’s poison powder.

“Damnit, you coward! Fight me fair and square!”

“I refuse!! The term 'fair and square' is only used an excuse to give yourself an advantage!! That, if anything, is true cowardice, Kabutonga No. 1!!”

“Curse you, Scarab King! You're only skilled in strategy and words!!”

The extras closed in and began putting pressure on Kabutonga No. 1. Kabutonga No. 1 was a hero of justice, so he couldn't just attack the manipulated women.

“Don't worry No. 1!”

“Just leave those women to us!”

That was when new Kabutongas appeared on the stage. Their large horns and bodies were bigger than No. 1. They were Kabutonga No. 1's allies, Kabutonga Hercules and Kabutonga Atlas.

“So you've come, Hercules! Atlas!”

Kabutonga No. 1 that Shizuka was acting as had been designed using the Japanese rhinoceros beetle as a motif. Because of that, it had a smaller body compared to Hercules and Atlas, which meant that it required a smaller actor. Shizuka had been chosen because of her small body and because of the way she had showed off her moves in the previous show.

“Stag-man created an antidote for the poison powder. So just leave this to us!”

“No. 1, you go get Scarab King!”

“Sorry, please do! Hoooo!”

Following the script, Shizuka slipped through the women and closed in on Scarab King. Before Shizuka, they couldn’t find anyone who could have been able to pull off this swift kind of move. In that sense, she was living up to the stage manager's hopes.

“Damn you, Stag-man! That traitor again!?”

“Scarab King, your ambition ends here!”

Using the momentum from her running, Shizuka jumped. In reality, there was a trampoline hidden there that couldn't be seen from below the stage. She used the trampoline well and made a big jump, flying towards the Scarab King, with feet first.

“Kabutongaaaa Kiiiiiiick!!”

Just before the kick actually connected, fireworks and smoke went off on the stage. Using the light and smoke as cover, Scarab King dodged the kick and Shizuka landed on a cushion right behind him. It would be dangerous for both of the actors if she actually landed her kick.

The children cheered. To them, it looked like the Kabutonga Kick connected and caused Scarab King to explode.

“Good job, Shizuka-chan.”

“Ahaha, thank you very much!”

Scarab King called out to Shizuka as he quickly got up and got into his position. He held his hands on his chest and squatted down, while Shizuka moved to stand in front of him. After a few seconds, the smoke cleared and the two could be seen again.

“D-Damn, well done Kabutonga No. 1... However, you didn't win using your own power! I lost to Stag-man- no, I lost to our own technology!”

“That's where you're wrong, Scarab King!”

Shizuka swung her right hand around with a wide gesture and put her hand on her chest.

“You simply lost to the justice budding inside of Stag-man's heart!”

“Justice... I won't accept it... I won't accept this... that kind of thing is...”

Scarab King slowly collapsed.

“I won't be destroyed...”

The hand he reached out towards Kabutonga No. 1 fell to the ground before it could reach. It was the last moments of a great evil after being vanquished. It was some splendid acting from a veteran that had played villains for several decades.

“I will return... as many times as it takes... Kabutonga, all you've done... was

for nothing... Wahahahahaha...haha...ha...”

Scarab King's laughter grew weaker, until it eventually faded away as he died. The women were saved by the antidote, and the story got a happy ending.

However, that was when something unexpected happened.

“Uwaaaa!?”

“W-What's with this girl!?”

Atlas's and Hercules's actors screamed out all of a sudden. Since voice actors stood in for the voices in the show, the physical actors were forbidden to actually scream or talk. When Shizuka turned around, she saw Kabutonga Atlas flying through the air.

Atlas's actor was large, and the costume he was wearing was big and heavy. As he slammed into the stage floor, the sound reached further than expected. It was a heavy sound that even made the children worry. Atlas didn't move a muscle after that.

“So that's where you were... Hercules-cha~n...”

A lone girl carrying a large flyswatter had been the one that sent Atlas flying.

“Is that-!?”

“I was getting worried since I hadn't seen you for so long...”

“R-Ruth-san!!”

That girl's name was Ruthkania Nye Pardomshiha, a girl that Shizuka got really well along with.

“...worried that you might be out breeding somewhere!!”

Ruth's eyes looked the same as those of a dangerous predator. She had caught her prey with her eyes and held her large flyswatter using both her hands. Her next prey was Kabutonga Hercules. Ruth had come on top of the stage to rid

the world of the evil(?) beetles.

“As I thought you increased your numbers, Hercules-chan!! And you even got this big!!”

“W-What!?”

Unable to swallow the situation, Kabutonga Hercules remained motionless. He thought that Ruth was just an extra, and that he had forgotten his part of the script. So he looked out towards the stage manager, as if asking for help.

“Chance!”

Not missing that opening, Ruth rushed forwards.

“How foolish! To give me an opening yourself!”

“Oh no!”

Shizuka hurriedly ran forwards. She was planning on stopping Ruth.

I knew this would happen if I went into any details about my work, so why is Ruth here!?

When faced with beetles, the normally peaceful and calm Ruth's personality turned incredibly violent. That was because she had some tragic memories regarding them. Those memories left a scar in her heart and she would lose her sanity whenever she was faced with beetles.

Knowing that, Shizuka hid the details around her work from Koutarou and the others. If she had said that she was going to appear in a show about beetles, it was obvious what Ruth would do. The safest option had been to not tell her.

Despite that, Ruth was now here, targeting Hercules. Regardless of the circumstances, she had to do something now, or Hercules's life was in danger.

“Move!”

“Woah!?”

Shizuka pushed Hercules to the side and faced Ruth. Hercules's actor didn't know how dangerous Ruth was when she was like this. At this rate, he would be done in before he realized. So the only way to protect him was for Shizuka to face Ruth personally.

“Fu, Fufu, another new beetle appears... fufufu, to think you'd come out on your own...”

“Ruth-san, return to your senses! It's me, Shizuka!”

“I am sane. I'm only doing what Pardomshiha's honor and tradition demands me to do.”

Ruth swung down the flyswatter.

“It demands me to destroy you beetles!”

“She's fast!?”

Shizuka caught the grip of the flyswatter with her left arm. It wasn't the top of the flyswatter, and Shizuka's thick costume dispersed the power. But even then, Ruth's strike had a tremendous impact.

“This is bad No. 1! It seems like the antidote isn't working on that girl! You need to somehow knock her out without hurting her.”

Hercules's voice rang out from the speakers.

The antidote didn't work on Ruth and she was obeying Scarab King's orders by attacking the Kabutongas. The stage manager had decided to continue the show in order to survive the situation. And he was asking for Shizuka to win.

“You make it sound so easy!”

Shizuka complained as she continued to block Ruth's attacks.

Using her flyswatter, elbows, kicks and backhands, Ruth was attacking Shizuka with unimaginably sharp moves. Her rampant mind had gained complete control of her body, and she had turned into a vicious battle machine.

All Shizuka could do was block Ruth's attacks. She attacked swiftly through sheer instinct, on top of that, Shizuka was wearing Kabtuonga's outfit, making it hard to move and attack. It would be a miracle to knock Ruth out without harming her in this situation.

“Please stop moving, I'll make it easy for you!”

“Kyaaaa!?”

Ruth's flyswatter swung right below Shizuka's nose. The attack was on the verge of hitting, and a chill ran down her spine.

“It's impossible to like this! I'll go all out, Ruth-san! Don't hate me, okay!?”

“Hate!? Of course I do! My chest burns with its hatred for you!!”

Ruth continued with her sharp attacks, while Shizuka dodged her attacks and changed her stance. That wasn't the stance of Kabutonga, but Shizuka's own stance.

“Quit moving around!!”

“Satomi-kun, you better buy me something later!!”

Shizuka exhaled and closed the distance to Ruth.

“Do you want to seduce my Satomi-sama that badly!?”

Hearing those words, Ruth recalled her tragic memories.

She recalled how she had felt when Koutarou had embraced her, and then when he had whispered the beetle’s name. She had felt a deep sense of discouragement, similar to despair.

I won't allow Satomi-sama to choose beetles over me again! I definitely won't allow it!!

Ruth couldn't process the oddity that Kabutonga No. 1 had uttered Koutarou's name. She was just desperately protecting to keep her precious things from being stolen from her.

“Noooooooooooo!!”

Ruth shouted out with all her might and swung down the flyswatter. The flyswatter cut through the air and roared. It had the most power out of all of her attacks she had made today.

“This is!? But!!”

However, Shizuka deflected the blow to the left at the very last second and used the momentum of her move to tackle Ruth with her right shoulder.

“Agh.”

The blow hit Ruth in her stomach, expelled the air she had in her lungs and

caused her body to stiffen up.

“Alright!”

She could feel the hit go through. Certain of her victory, Shizuka stopped moving. Ruth's body then began leaning over.

“C-Curse you, b-beetles...”

Shortly thereafter, Ruth fainted. However, her grudge for beetles continued until the very end. After confirming that Ruth had lost her consciousness, Shizuka was finally able to relax.

“Phew... if Satomi-kun doesn't buy me a cake or two, this won't have been worth the effort...”

Holding on to Ruth, Shizuka smiled wryly inside her helmet.

Part 4

Having finished eating lunch after watching the movie, Koutarou and Kiriha visited the attractions at the park. The merry-go-round, the spinning coffee cups, the haunted mansion and the house of mirrors. The attractions that Kiriha took Koutarou to were all for children. However, having vaguely begun to understand, Koutarou didn't voice a single complaint.

Rather than thinking of her as a girl of the same age, I would probably be better off thinking of her like a child...

That's how Koutarou saw Kiriha today, and he wasn't mistaken. Kiriha had a very childlike smile as she visited the various attractions. Yesterday, he had hesitated because of that, but today he laughed loudly with her. That's because he knew that there was something precious to Kiriha on the other side of that smile.

“Koutarou, let's ride that next!”

“The Ferris wheel, huh. Alright, let's go.”

“Yes!”

By the time Kiriha had pointed out the Ferris wheel, Koutarou had already begun running. Kiriha quickly followed after him. Today, Koutarou was acting as childish as Kiriha. The two of them raced towards the Ferris wheel and by the time they reached the platform, the line had just emptied.

“Koutarou.”

“Yeah.”

The two smiled and nodded at each other. They passed under the gate and approached the Ferris wheel.

The Ferris wheel in this amusement park was big. It was the largest in the prefecture when the park had been established ten years ago. So by the time the two of them reached the gondola, just looking up at it required them to twist their necks.

“I have gotten much taller...”

Kiriha had a nostalgic look as she looked up on the Ferris wheel. In the past, when she had stood here, she had been unable to see the top. However as time passed, Kiriha had grown and she was now able to do so now.

“Kiriha-san.”

Hearing Koutarou's voice, Kiriha looked down, and there she saw him calling for her in front of the slow moving gondola. Behind him was the clerk in charge, holding the door open, waiting for them.

“Ah, sorry.”

Kiriha ran towards Koutarou and the clerk as she apologized.

Now that I think about it, the same thing happened that time.

Kiriha recalled her past self. She was looking up towards the Ferris wheel, with her eyes sparkling, as the boy she was with called for her.

“*Kii-chan.*”

“*Sorry, I'm coming!*”

The boy had been the same age as she was now. Since she had been so young then, she couldn't remember his face. However, she could clearly remember that she loved him, even now.

“*Eii!*”

As Kiriha had approached the boy she pulled his hand towards her and hopped into the gondola. Remembering that, Kiriha smiled like a mischievous child as she stared at Koutarou.

“Eii!”

“Ah, hey.”

Spurred on by her memories, she grabbed Koutarou's hand and jumped on the gondola.

“That's dangerous.”

At that moment, the voice of Koutarou and the boy from her memories voice overlapped. The boy and Koutarou had scolded her the same way.

Onii-chan...

Her ten-year-old memories turned to tears and flowed out through her eyes.

“Fu, fufu, fu... I'm sorry...”

The clerk outside closed the door and locked it. The well maintained gondola then rose up without making a sound. However, Koutarou was distracted by Kiriha and didn't notice any of that.

“Kiriha-san...?”

Tears streamed down Kiriha's cheek. The gentle sun light shining through the window caused the tears to sparkle. Seeing that, Koutarou was rendered speechless by the beauty of those tears.

“Koutarou...”

Kiriha grabbed at her chest with both hands. Feelings kept flowing out from the bottom of her heart.

I really do still love that person...

Having spent both yesterday and today going to those memorable spots, Kiriha finally reached a conclusion. She felt that she needed to tell Koutarou about her conclusion.

“Koutarou, there's something I want to tell you.”

Still holding on to her chest with her left hand, she wiped her tears away with her right. But even then, the tears continued streaming down her cheeks. Kiriha gave up on wiping her tears and smiled at Koutarou.

“It's fine, you don't need to tell me.”

Kiriha was about to talk to Koutarou about what she had been thinking about for the past week. However, having tagged along Kiriha yesterday and today, Koutarou felt like he didn't need to hear what she had to say. During these two days, Koutarou was convinced that Kiriha would never do something terrible.

“With all that's happened, I feel like it doesn't matter.”

Koutarou was smiling, he already understood. Even though Kiriha might invade the surface, he knew that she would never do it in a cruel way.

The reason for that was because of her past. It was probably related to the spots they had visited these two days. But since they were special, precious memories, Koutarou didn't want to force it out of her.

“No, please listen. You have that right.”

However, Kiriha shook her head and stared right at him.

“And most of all, I want you to listen. You're my only friend here on the

surface; I want you to know my wish.”

Kiriha's words had weight behind them. That might have had something to do with the light residing deep inside her eyes, showing her trust and friendship for the first time. That greatly shook Koutarou's feelings, and he created a spot for her inside of his heart.

“If you call me a friend, I have no choice but to listen.”

“...Thank you, Koutarou...”

Eight months had passed since Koutarou first met Kiriha.

The two of them had finally become friends.

Part 5

“Where should I start...”

As she said that, Kiriha wiped away her tears again. By now her tears had stopped and the last traces of them were wiped from her cheeks.

“From anywhere's fine, isn't it? It's not like we're in a hurry.”

“That's true. Then let's start from the beginning.”

Looking straight at Koutarou, Kiriha slowly began talking. Koutarou corrected his pose and faced her.

The gondola was slowly rising and had now reached halfway up to the top. At this height, they could see past the buildings; the distant scenery came into sight. Since the day was coming to an end, the scenery left quite an impression.

“Ten years ago, I got into a fight with my father and ran to the surface.”

“A fight? I can't imagine you getting into a fight.”

Even though she had said that she had gotten into a fight with her father, Koutarou couldn't imagine Kiriha getting emotional. He had never seen that happen during these eight months.

“Ten years ago, I was a child. It's not like I was an adult in the body of a child.”

“Now that you say it, that's true.”

Although she was very mature now, Kiriha was once a child too. Although that was supposed to be obvious, Koutarou felt that it was strange. As Koutarou laughed, a smile formed on Kiriha's lips. As a result, the stiff atmosphere between them lightened up.

“Most of all, ten years ago was when my mother passed away, so it was an unstable time for me. I got into a fight with my father over something trivial and ran away from home.”

“I understand how you must have felt.”

“That's right... you lost your mother too.”

Both Koutarou and Kiriha had lost their mother, so each could understand how the other felt. Now that they considered each other friends, they understood it even more.

“...Anyway, having run away from home, I went to the place where I had been forbidden to go to: the surface.”

Though Kiriha was staring at Koutarou, she was also looking at her past, ten years ago when she had run away from home.

“And that's when I met that person.”

“What person?”

“It was a boy the same age around same age as we are now. I don't remember his name. I'm sure he told me, but all I can remember is calling him onii-chan.”

The most important thing for Kiriha in particular was her meeting with a boy on the surface.

“Ahaha, so even you had a cute side back then.”

Koutarou couldn't imagine Kiriha using the term 'onii-chan' today. Koutarou found it funny and burst out laughing.

“You say that like I'm not cute now.”

“Yes, that's what I thought up until yesterday.”

“What about today?”

“You still have a surprisingly cute side to you.”

“You don't need to call it surprising.”

Kiriha pouted, slightly dissatisfied. Since that pout was surprisingly adorable, Koutarou started laughing even more.

“Anyways.”

Kiriha exhaled slightly and returned to normal.

“That person was a bit childish, he was gentle, had a sense of humor, and he would even properly listen to a child like me.”

“Hmm...”

Feeling nostalgic and happy, Kiriha continued talking. From the way she described him, it seemed like she really loved that boy. Koutarou felt a little bit jealous.

“He was similar to you, Koutarou.”

“Well, aren't I being thought of highly.”

“If you weren't, I probably wouldn't have told you.”

“Don't say that straight to my face..”

Koutarou felt embarrassed and his cheeks turned red. He couldn't quite calm down when a woman complimented him to his face.

“If I didn't, you wouldn't feel troubled, would you?”

“So that was your goal.”

“Fufu.”

Koutarou smiled. He was always being teased by Kiriha, but for some reason, he didn't seem to mind today.

“...And I then spent a few days with that person. As a child I was selfish, so all I did was cause trouble for him.”

“You being selfish hasn't changed from back then.”

“Koutarou.”

“I can't help but sympathize with the guy.”

Having been teased by Kiriha every now and then, Koutarou found it strange that she would say that she was selfish as a child. If she wasn't selfish now, just how selfish was she back then?

“I'm not feeling like myself... why today of all days...”

Kiriha smiled wryly. Normally, she would dance circles around Koutarou as usual, but today their roles had been reversed. It was the norm for Kiriha to trouble Koutarou, but now it was Koutarou who was troubling Kiriha.

But there's no need to mind. It's not like it's unpleasant...

This change had happened because both Koutarou and Kiriha had accepted one another in the deepest part of their hearts, but Kiriha still wasn't aware of that. She wasn't aware, but she didn't feel unpleasant, so she decided not to mind. In fact, she felt happy.

“I went to all kinds of places with that person. We'd play in the park, or go shop in the city. He even brought me along to the zoo and amusement park.”

Kiriha looked through the window at the amusement park and zoo. As she did, she remembered the events of today and yesterday, and her memories a decade ago overlapped with those.

“The zoo and the amusement park, so you really...”

“That's right, Koutarou. I had you tag along to the places I went with that person.”

Kiriha nodded at Koutarou and pulled out a card from her pocket. The aged trading card had been scribbled on by a permanent marker. Seeing that, Koutarou pulled out the card he had gotten from the pamphlet. It was the same card as Kiriha's. However, unlike hers, it was brand-new and shining.

“I got this card from that person. Getting this made me really happy... so I had him go to the movies with me too...”

Kiriha looked at the card. She was gently gazing at the someone on the other side of the card.

The card had been an extra when buying snacks in combination of the screening of the movie ten years ago. She had been treasuring it for these past ten years, because she had gently been staring at the person on the other side of that card.

“... You loved him, right?”

Koutarou remembered Kiriha saying that back at the sea during their summer vacation. That she had gotten it from the person she loved a long time ago.

“Yes. He was my first love.”

Kiriha slowly traced the surface of the card with her finger.

Of course it'd be precious if you got it from your first love...

Seeing Kiriha gently stroking the card, Koutarou understood the meaning behind the gentle smile she would show from time to time.

Back at the sea, he didn't quite understand the meaning behind Kiriha's love. However, now he fully understood. It was the type of love you'd feel for someone you harbored romantic feelings for.

“However, those fun days didn't last for long.”

Kiriha's smile vanished and she sadly dropped her shoulders.

“What happened?”

“They came to pick me up. I ran away from home after all.”

“Oh yeah, you were the daughter of a distinguished family.”

Kiriha was the daughter of the chief. Her running away from home caused the entire clan to go out and look for her. As a result, she was taken back to the underground. Torn away from her beloved boy.

“That's how I parted with that person. Ever since then, I wasn't allowed to go to the surface, so I couldn't meet him again.”

“You wanted to though, right?”

“Of course. I may have been young, but I was serious about wanting to marry him.”

Still looking sad, Kiriha laughed slightly.

Kiriha's first love that occurred when she ran away from home ended at the same time she was taken back. Ten years had passed since that short while, but Kiriha still hadn't forgotten about it, even for a day. And her feelings had been poured into the card she held in her hand.

“That's why I applied to become the commander when it was decided that we would invade the surface.”

“What!?”

When he heard her next words, Koutarou's eyes opened wide. Having heard that, even he could understand the real reason for why Kiriha had come to the surface, and it left him astonished.

“So you invaded the surface just so you could meet with your first love!?”

“That's right.”

Kiriha nodded. Koutarou's guess was spot on.

“That's why this invasion needs to happen peacefully. I couldn't bring myself to fan the flames of war in the city that person lived in.”

Kiriha had invaded the surface to find her first love. That's because if she didn't have the goal of an invasion, she wouldn't have been let up on the surface. And of course, if she got into trouble with the people on the surface, her meeting with her first love would only end in tragedy. That's why she had to invade peacefully.

“Wait a minute. When you first arrived, didn't you say to hand over room 106 to you so you could mass produce weapons?”

When Koutarou had first met Kiriha, she had said that she wanted to construct a shrine in room 106 so she could mass produce spiritual energy weapons like Karama and Korama. That obviously contradicted what she had just said.

“In reality, that was a gamble of sorts.”

“A gamble?”

“If I put it like that, I was hoping that you would resist.”

“I see, so that's why!”

Koutarou had always felt doubts about if Kiriha actually wanted to steal room 106. That hadn't been his misunderstanding at all, but the truth.

“I needed you to resist. If the altar was completed in the early stages, the radical faction would push to invade using force. War against the surface had to be avoided at all costs. Nothing good would have come out from obtaining room 106 back then.”

The biggest obstacle for Kiriha, who wanted to invade peacefully, was the radical faction that wanted to invade through force. And if room 106 was obtained early on, there was a chance that they would run out of control. In

order to prevent that, she had to create a situation that made it difficult for her to obtain the room.

“That's why you kept fueling my unease, but did nothing?”

“I'm sorry, Koutarou. I couldn't win or lose the battle for room 106. If I won, the radical faction would mass produce weapons and march onto the surface. If I lost, they would still move to take room 106 by force. Either way, a war with the surface would erupt.”

“And if war happened, your wish would never come true...”

Kiriha was a pacifist to begin with, so she didn't wish for a military invasion. On top of that, she wanted to meet with her first love once more.

In order to satisfy those desires and peacefully invade, there was a need for the ownership of room 106 to remain in a standoff.

The doubts that Koutarou had felt had appeared because of that.

“Really, if you had just said something I would have cooperated with you from the start...”

Koutarou scratched his head and smiled wryly. Kiriha's goal was rational after all; she didn't want to start a war and she wanted to meet her first love.

“Koutarou, it's just as you say. Thinking back to it, I should have asked for your cooperation from the start. But at that time I had nothing to fall back on, and I couldn't truly trust you.”

“Well, I guess it can't be helped, we had just met after all...”

Having only just met, neither of them knew if they could trust the other. However, after these eight months, they were certain that they could do so now. That's why Kiriha had revealed everything to Koutarou, and why he had believed her.

“I'm really sorry, Koutarou.”

“Eh?”

“I'm sorry for deceiving you all this time. I want to apologize for that.”

Kiriha had used a lot of methods to keep Koutarou from trusting her, like using simple lies or inducement, trying to seduce or provoke him, earning his trust and then making him put his guard up. Although it was necessary, she still felt bad about it.

“It's fine, really. But... as a young man in puberty, I'm a bit sad ...”

Hearing Kiriha's apology, Koutarou smiled wryly and dropped his shoulders. He looked sad, just like he had said.

Koutarou wasn't angry at Kiriha for everything that had happened up until now. If it was in order to prevent something even bigger, he could forgive her. And she had helped on more occasions than one. However, there was still something he felt was sad.

“Sad?”

“If you were serious about your tempting me, I would feel more like a man.”

Koutarou was a healthy boy of age.

“Koutarou...”

Kiriha had been taken back by Koutarou's words, however, the next moment she began laughing energetically.

“Fufufufu, ahahaha!”

The sun that had begun to set lit up Kiriha's profile. However, her smile was bright enough to challenge the sun's light. That was probably the first time Koutarou had seen her smile from the bottom of her heart.

“You don't have to laugh that much. I'm young so it's only natural.”

Obviously being laughed at, Koutarou crossed his arm, slightly irritated. However, Kiriha wasn't laughing for the reason he was thinking.

“Fufufufu, I feel proud as a woman if those words are true.”

Kiriha believed him; that Satomi Koutarou was not a man that would fall for such cheap tricks.

Part 6

Having gotten off the Ferris wheel, Koutarou and Kiriha headed towards another attraction. There was one more place that she wanted to go.

“By the way, Kiriha-san, are you having any luck finding your first love?”

“No, not quite. It was ten years ago after all. There're extremely few clues to go after.”

Kiriha shook her head bitterly next to Koutarou. Her face was dyed red by the setting sun. The time was now approaching evening, and the shadows trailing behind them had grown longer.

“Well, if the only clue you have is a card, it'd be hard.”

“There is one more clue, but I don't know if he still has it or not.”

The first time Koutarou had heard about Kiriha's first love was at their trip to the sea during their summer vacation. A couple of months had passed since then, but she still hadn't found any clues about her first love's whereabouts.

“There are far too few traces left. Nobody remembers him; not even I remember his face. Even if I were to find him somehow, how would I know it’s him?”

“I guess you’d have to check every man in this city closing in on his thirties, huh?”

Kiriha had met the boy ten years ago. At that time he looked like he was a high school student, so right now he should be close to his thirties. However, there were far too many men that fit the bill.

“He might not even be in this city any more. Even if he was, would he even

remember meeting me?”

“But even then, you can't help but look...”

“...Yeah...”

Kiriha nodded and looked up overhead. The blue winter sky was perfectly clear.

“You love him that much?”

“Yes. Having spent these past two days visiting these memorable places, I have reaffirmed that. Even now I am love with that person.”

Kiriha's feelings were perfectly clear, just like the sky. She would find him no matter what. Her determination had remained unshaken by these past ten years.

“That's why I want to meet him. I'm well aware that even if we meet, he might not accept my feelings. But if we don't, I can't move forward.”

They had only been together for a few days, but even then, Kiriha felt something for the boy.

The boy had grown into an adult, and might have forgotten about Kiriha. He might even have married and built a family of his own. Even if that was the case, Kiriha wanted to see him. But she didn't want to ruin his current life. She just wanted to meet him and tell him her feelings for him; that's what she had wanted to do for these past ten years. She didn't mind even if he didn't reciprocate her feelings. If she didn't, she could probably never forget about him and fall in love with someone else. She had to confess to him if she wanted to move forward with her life.

“I want to meet him, tell him how I feel and put an end to this. Of course, if he were to accept me, I wouldn't be happier.”

Kiriha smiled a refreshingly straight smile. Up until now, Kiriha had never talked about this to anyone else. So this smile was proof that she really

thought of Koutarou as her friend.

“So you can't continue half-assed. Hehe, I like it.”

Having heard what Kiriha had to say, Koutarou grinned cheerfully.

Koutarou loved this kind of topic: wanting to put an end to something, regardless of the results. That's because that awkward way of living was something Koutarou was familiar with. So he really understood how she felt, and he felt much closer to her than ever.

“Koutarou?”

“Kiriha-san, I'll help you too, so let's find him.”

That's why Koutarou felt like helping Kiriha. He felt like he was looking for his own first love, that's just how close he felt to Kiriha.

“Eh?”

Kiriha's eyes opened wide in surprise by Koutarou's unexpected offer. She never expected him to want to help.

“I just felt like seeing the face of the guy that would make a woman like you feel that way.”

“Koutarou...”

Kiriha instinctively grasped at her chest, with her eyes moistening.

That's right... that's the kind of man you are...

Kiriha then recalled why she had come to trust Koutarou. He was clumsy and awkward, but earnest and kind. That's why she had revealed everything to him. Having remembered that, Kiriha was happy for his feelings.

“And besides, now that I've heard this much, I want to see what happens next.”

“...Thank you, Koutarou...”

Kiriha smiled happily, and bowed deeply with her hand at her chest. That was the best way for her to show her gratitude.

“Stop it, don't worry about that. We're friends, right?”

“...That's right.”

Kiriha slowly looked up. By that time, Kiriha's smile had fully recovered.

“That said, watching someone else's love life makes you feel a bit envious.”

“That's true. I understand how you feel.”

After blinking a couple of times, Kiriha began cheerfully laughing and smiling. It was a special smile that really served as a proof of her friendship with Koutarou.

“That's why, after your matter has been settled, introduce me to some cute underground girls.”

“I got it, I'll try my hardest.”

“Alright, then we have a deal!”

Koutarou nodded and began laughing and smiling alongside Kiriha.

It was the same kind of smile he'd show to Kenji. Koutarou also thought of Kiriha as a precious friend.

“With that in mind, let's hurry up and find him. For my future's sake as well.”

“That's right, I need to push some girl from a distinguished family onto you so I can use you as a foothold for the surface invasion immediately.”

“Hey now.”

“Fufufu♪”

Kiriha smiled mischievously and began running away from Koutarou. Her long black hair sparkled in as it was bathed in sunlight.

She's surprisingly childish. But that makes sense. Since she's a leader of the

underground people, she can't really show that side to anyone...

Koutarou chased after Kiriha as he thought that.

“Hey, wait up!”

“No way!”

Ignoring Koutarou's calls, Kiriha skipped away from him. Looking at her from behind, Koutarou couldn't see any of her normal calm and composed attitude. She looked just like a child.

Kiriha made one last leap and landed by planting both of her feet into the ground. As she did, her hair fluttered in the air, and as it was still floating she spun around just as Koutarou came running up.

“Is tag already over?”

“Yes. This is where I wanted to go.”

Kiriha nodded and showed what was behind her using one of her hands.

“Something unlike you once more I see.”

“Is that so?”

Kiriha cheerfully smiled.

She had taken Koutarou in front of a roller coaster. Like the Ferris wheel, this roller coaster was the largest in the prefecture when it was made. It had given up the top spot for another roller coaster, but the size was still huge. Boasting a height of 70 meters and a drop of 65, the attraction spread out in front of Koutarou and Kiriha.

“...Actually, it might be just like you.”

These past two days, Koutarou had begun understand just what kind of girl Kiriha was. She normally looked calm and composed, but she hid her childish fervor inside. With that in mind, it was a very Kiriha-like choice.

“It sounds like you're calling me a tomboy, and it's very unpleasant.”

“Yes, that's what I meant.”

“That's mean, Koutarou.”

Laughing, Kiriha approached the entrance to the roller coaster's terminal.

“Oh yeah, do you have any memories with this roller coaster?”

Koutarou followed after her. Kiriha then stopped in front of the sign next to the entrance.

“Yeah. Ten years ago, I couldn't get on this ride.”

Kiriha smiled wryly as she turned around and said that.

“You couldn't ride it? Was there too long of a line?”

Past the entrance to the terminal was an orderly line. Seeing that, Koutarou assumed that Kiriha couldn't ride the attraction because of a long line. At the time, since it was the largest roller coaster in the prefecture, the line to the ride stretched quite a bit.

“No, that wasn't it. Look here, Koutarou.”

“Let's see... 'You must be at least 140 centimeters to ride this attraction'...?”

On the sign was an illustration of a child and the number 140 had been written by it.

On this roller coaster, there was a height requirement of 140 centimeters for safety reasons.

“The tomboy ten years ago was short you see. So I couldn't get on.”

“I see, so this is another regret of yours.”

Koutarou imagined a small Kiriha ten years ago selfishly saying she wanted to get on, with the boy and clerk trying to soothe her.

“Kukuku, that was misfortunate...”

Finding his own imagination funny, Koutarou began laughing.

“I don't like the way you said it, but yes that's right. So I couldn't get on it.”

“You're surprisingly persistent.”

“Of course. I'm a woman who's still in love with a man she met ten years ago, you know?”

“That's true.”

Koutarou and Kiriha laughed out together. The two then began walking towards the end of the line. The queue wasn't very long, so they would probably be able to ride it if they waited for ten minutes.

“Roller coaster...”

As they reached the end of the line, Kiriha muttered those words. Hearing her voice, Koutarou looked towards her while she was looking around the area, deep in thought. To Koutarou it looked like she was reminiscing.

But why...

However to Koutarou, Kiriha's expression looked lonely. It didn't look like the expression of someone about to accomplish and get over one of their regrets.

Could it be that—

Staring at Kiriha's profile, Koutarou looked like he was about to reach a conclusion.

That was when the ground started shaking intensely.

Kurano Kiriha

Part 1

Sunday, December 20

At first, Koutarou assumed the vibrations he could feel were from the roller coaster passing by. But the shaking was too intense for that to be the case, and it showed no signs of dying down anytime soon. He also felt like the shaking was coming from below. It would be unnatural for vibrations from the roller coaster to come from there.

“What is this?”

While Koutarou was confused, the shaking started growing in intensity. At first it was just a small shaking, but now it felt like small impacts kept assaulting the bottom of Koutarou's feet.

Koutarou wasn't the only one confused; the other visitors around him were as well. The sudden earthquake clouded their expression, even more so since they were about to get on a roller coaster.

“Could this be!?”

However, Kiriha's expression clouded over even more. The moment she felt the shake, her expression regained its normal sharpness. She had a guess regarding the vibrations.

“Karama, Korama!”

Kiriha quickly called out for her two haniwas. The next moment, they appeared by her side. Without even hearing her order, they had taken action.

“Yes Ho-, nee-san! We can detect it from our side too Ho-!”

“Analyzing the vibration pattern, reaction of a spiritual power generator detected. Analyzation complete, there's a 97% certainty that it's an underground submergence boat Ho-!”

In a hurry, they reported a lot of information. Hearing their reports, Kiriha's expression turned even more severe.

“I thought so! What's the situation!?”

“It's at a depth of 20 meters and surfacing!”

“They're planning on coming up to the surface Ho-! Their predicted surface point is 50 meters to the south-southwest!”

“Preposterous! In a place like this!?”

Kiriha jumped over the fence of the terminal and headed outside, running towards the predicted surface point.

If the haniwas’ information was correct, this vibration came from a vehicle that the People of the Earth use to get to the surface, the underground submergence boat, or submarine. And that was now about to appear on the surface, in the middle of this crowded amusement park.

“Kiriha-san!? What's wrong!?”

Koutarou ran after Kiriha, calling out to her repeatedly.

“This is bad... if it was just a scouting force, it wouldn't appear in a place like this!”

Koutarou's words didn't reach Kiriha's ears as she was panicking. What caused her to panic was that an Earth Empire's submergence boat was about to appear.

Kiriha's direct subordinates didn't use an underground submergence boat. Since they wanted to peacefully invade, they had no reason to use one to begin with. If they were to carelessly use a submergence boat, it would definitely stand out. So there was no way they would appear here of all places.

The only time she could imagine it happening would be in the case of an emergency, but in that case, she would be contacted ahead of time. Since that

hadn't happened, there was only one possibility left.

“Such a reckless action!”

Kiriha ground her teeth.

There was only one reason for an underground submergence boat to appear. The radical faction, or a part of it, had decided to recklessly appear on the surface and use military force. Since their purpose was to show off their power, they didn't care if they stood out. If anything, they would choose a place with lots of people on purpose. The submergence boat was surfacing to attack the people here.

“What's wrong, Kiriha-san!?”

“Ho-! There's an attack Ho-!”

The two haniwas responded to Koutarou's question. They floated next to him and chased after Kiriha.

“An attack!? What do you mean!?”

“The people that don't approve of nee-san's way of doing things are coming to the surface to attack people Ho-!”

“I see, so it's that radical faction Kiriha-san mentioned!”

Since there was a faction that wanted to invade the surface using force, Kiriha couldn't seize room 106. Nor could she fail at seizing it.

Hearing what Karama had to say, Koutarou remembered Kiriha saying that a while ago.

“That's right Ho-! So nee-san is planning on stopping them Ho-!”

“So that's what she's doing!”

Having understood the situation, Koutarou chased after Kiriha's back.

As a pacifist looking for her first love, Kiriha couldn't overlook the radical faction's reckless actions. Trying to stop their attack, she was hurrying to

their predicted surface point.

“But this is dangerous Ho-! At this rate, nee-san will be killed Ho-!”

“The radical faction only thinks of nee-san as a nuisance Ho-!”

“Then hurry up and contact your allies! Get them to do something about this situation!”

“Understood Ho-!”

The radical faction despised Kiriha, who hated the use of military force. The chance of them listening to Kiriha was low, and in this situation, there was a chance that they would kill her and make it look like an accident.

“I won't forgive them! I definitely won't forgive them for attacking the surface!”

Even though she knew that, Kiriha still had to go. If she didn't, she wouldn't be able to protect what was precious to her.

At that moment, the asphalt in front of Kiriha cracked, and a giant something appeared. It was a black cylindrical structure, several meters long and made out of metal. It broke through the ground and towered vertically, looking like something similar to a chimney.

Part 2

Shizuka and Yurika carried an unconscious Ruth, lending her a shoulder each. They were headed towards the medical office inside the amusement park, planning to lay her down on a bed until she woke up.

“Nijino-san, keep it together.”

“But, it's heavyyy!”

However, since Yurika was weak, her walking was pace slowed down considerably. Losing to Ruth's weight, her body began bending.

“That's pathetic...”

“Yurika, you can do it! Show us your cosplay spirit!”

“Even if you say that...!”

In reality, Theia was stronger than Yurika, but because of her height, she couldn't work together with Shizuka to carry Ruth.

“Do you want me to help you?”

“Absolutely not, anything but that!”

Sanae offered to help, but because of her fear of ghosts, Yurika refused. Even if she got stronger, she didn't want to be possessed. In that case, Sanae could only help using her poltergeist. But since her abilities weren’t intended to be used over a long period of time, it wasn't that much of a help.

“Then give it your all!”

“I think it's cruel to expect that from Yurika.”

“Satomi-saaa~n, save meee~!”

Yurika was once again in trouble with something that didn't matter. And once she got into trouble, she relied on others, just like always.

At that moment, they heard a large sound coming from the left. It was a loud sound similar to an explosion, alongside it was the sound of things breaking.

“Kyaaaa!”

“Calm down, Nijino-san, Ruth-san will fall!”

“What, what just happened!?”

“Theia, over there!”

Surprised by the loud sound, the four girls looked towards the direction of where it came from. When they did, they saw a cylindrical pillar appearing behind the buildings. The black cylindrical structure stood out from the other fairytale like buildings.

“What is that!? Ruth!... is still unconscious...!”

Sensing that something bad was happening, Theia used her own armband to gather information and sent the unmanned aircraft towards the pillar.

“That's Koutarou and Kiriha! And who are those guys!?”

Through the screen projected from her armband, Theia could see Koutarou and Kiriha, and a man facing them. From inside the pillar came several more men and women carrying weapons, protecting the mysterious man.

“Is it some kind of event?”

“What kind of event would tear through the ground!?”

“Well, that's true...”

The men facing Koutarou and Kiriha had come through the pillar sticking up through the hole in the ground. But who could imagine an event that required tearing a hole in the ground? It was more reasonable to imagine something else was happening.

“Then that would be bad!! Does that mean that Satomi-kun and Kurano-san are facing off against people with weapons!?”

By the time Shizuka shouted that out, Theia had already begun running. She had left the others behind and ran as fast as she could.

“Koutarou!!”

I have a bad feeling about this!

Theia had noticed that Kiriha was hiding some troubles and that Koutarou was getting involved in it. Once she saw the mysterious man, she sensed the danger Koutarou and Kiriha was in faster than anyone else.

Please be alright, Koutarou!

The princess was rushing to the site where her vassal was in danger. It was an action that was unusual for a royal princess, but Theia couldn't help herself.

She couldn't think of anything but Koutarou.

“I'm coming too!”

Still not understanding the situation, Sanae sensed the severity of it all from Theia's behavior and quickly pursued her.

To Sanae, Koutarou wasn't just a roommate. While the 'Family Safety' charm was still hanging from her neck, she had a reason to rush to Koutarou's aid.

“Ah, wait, you two!!”

Shizuka's voice didn't reach Theia. Sanae heard her but she was planning on going along with Theia to meet up with Koutarou. Seeing that, Shizuka decided that she was going to head towards Koutarou and Kiriha as well.

“Nijino-san, let's take Ruth-san to that bench over there!”

“Ah, y-yes!”

Urging Yurika, Shizuka laid Ruth down on a nearby bench. She was planning to keep her here until she got back.

“Nijino-san, please take care of Ruth-san! I'm worried about those two going alone so I'm going too!”

“I-I understand!”

“I'm counting on you!”

Shizuka ran after Theia and Sanae while listening to Yurika's response. She couldn't leave those two alone if they had flown off the handle.

“...U-Uhm...”

Yurika looked back and forth between the sleeping Ruth and the three girls running.

If I just leave them be, I feel like there'll be a big commotion...

Yurika began growing more and more anxious.

Unlike normally, there were lots of people here. And if Theia or Kiriha were to bring out their weapons, there would be repercussions. There might be people that would get hurt, and even if there wasn't, the situation would become messy.

“...I should go too.”

Yurika pulled herself together and nodded once, full of determination.

To prepare before any possible battles, she would raise a ward to keep people away and keep people safe while avoiding being seen. It was a job only Yurika could do.

“If Satomi-san was arrested, I would be troubled.”

For the sake of the people coming here to play, for the sake of Harumi and for the sake of graduating together with Koutarou, Yurika determined to go to battle at her own battlefield.

“Come, Angel Halo!”

Her very first job was to cast a protective barrier on the unconscious Ruth.

“...I'm sorry, Ruth-san. Just wait here for a while.”

Whispering those words into Ruth's ear, Yurika held the cane that appeared in her hand above her head and started incanting.

Part 3

Shijima Tayuma was an extreme man, even within the radical faction.

He was extraordinarily proud of being of the People of the Earth, and he had always found the thought of his people being driven underground incredibly provoking. In the recent years, he had gotten even more provoked and irritated by the large amount of People of the Earth admiring the culture on the surface.

Since that's the kind of man he was, when the leader of the People of the

Earth, Kurano Daiha, had decided to invade the surface, he had been happy enough to break into dance. He was certain that he would finally be able to regain his nation's glory. However, shortly thereafter he was horribly disappointed. The surface invader's commander, Kurano Kiriha's suggest plan of invasion was the complete opposite of what he had wanted.

To Tayuma, Kiriha's peaceful invasion seemed like she was selling off the nation's pride and glory. He believed that using force to regain what had been stolen was justice. What Kiriha had been so scared of was that difference in justice, but Tayuma was so sure of his justice that he didn't bother listening to Kiriha. He disregarded them as the words of a loser that had lost courage.

What further fueled this difference in view was the clan Tayuma was a part of. The Shijima clan was a warrior clan that had earned their reputation through bravery. Even if a harsh war awaited them should a military invasion happen, Tayuma didn't mind as it would only be a chance to show off his own courage and justice.

His pride as a People of the Earth, his pride as a member of a warrior clan, his ambition to make a name for himself in a war and the anger he felt when his hopes for a military invasion had been betrayed all worked together to make him suddenly take reckless actions. Roughly a year had passed since Daiha had decided to invade the surface. Tayuma's patience was now at its limit.

So Tayuma led his own men to the surface. Their goal was to show the world that the People of the Earth existed through the use of military force. By doing that, they would be declared enemies by the surface dwellers and the People of the Earth would be forced to use a military invasion. That was Tayuma's plan.

However, Kiriha wouldn't allow that. If she did, it would be the same as pulling the trigger on a conflict that would last for several decades. If that happened, the People of the Earth would be ruined before they could take

over the surface. So Kiriha stood in Tayuma's way, with resolute determination.

“Just what is the meaning of this, Shijima Tayuma!”

Kiriha glared at Tayuma, several in front of him and scolded him in a cold voice.

“Well, it looked like you were having trouble with your invasion, so I came to help. I'd prefer it if you thanked me.”

Despite Kiriha scolding him, Tayuma still had a confident look on his face. Tayuma was a man that had passed his forties, so he considered Kiriha, who wasn't even in her twenties, as a little girl only skilled with words.

He had a big body, and wore clothes similar to a chief Shinto priest. The eight subordinates behind him were wearing similar clothes, but theirs looked easier to move in. The subordinates were wearing a military uniform while Tayuma was wearing a formal uniform.

“Pull your troops back, Tayuma! Do that and I'll overlook you taking the underground submergence boat!”

“I can't just do that. The time to reclaim our stolen glory has finally come!”

Tayuma completely refused Kiriha's orders. He showed no hesitation whatsoever. Tayuma had come here after making up his mind.

Reclaiming their stolen glory...?

Standing next to Kiriha's side so as to make sure he wouldn’t get in the way, Koutarou remembered that he had heard those words before. They were words that Kiriha had said when they had first met. She had probably just said those words to alert him, but seeing her reject those words now made him feel at ease.

“Do you even understand, Tayuma!? Just showing the underground submergence boat to the people on the surface is dangerous enough! Taking

military action on top of that will only create a war!”

“That is just my wish! I'll dispel this long-held grudge in a war and show the world the power of the Shijima clan and reclaim this bountiful surface!”

Kiriha's role had been changed. In the past, Koutarou had obstructed Kiriha from getting her way, but now, it was Kiriha who was obstructing Tayuma to keep him from getting his way.

Kiriha-san is serious...

Kiriha trying to wisely persuade Tayuma was proof that what she had said before was true. Koutarou believed in her, but seeing her take action like this made him happy.

“Ridiculous! Are you so obsessed with fighting with the surface dwellers that you'd bring ruin upon the People of the Earth!?”

“We only need to win before that happens! And if we don't, it would still be an honor! Rather than living as dogs, the People of the Earth would be better off dying prideful deaths as wolves!”

“It's not like wolves are always fighting! You are just a mad dog!”

“You impudent little girl!”

Angered by being called a mad dog, Tayuma raised his right hand.

As he did, the eight men and women surrounding him raised their weapons. The weapons looked different from modern weaponry, and more like ceramic, similar to Karama and Korama. The weapons weren't just similar to Karama and Korama, but they were also spiritual energy weapons made by the same technology.

“Kiriha-san!?”

“It's okay, Koutarou.”

Koutarou began panicking when Kiriha had guns pointed towards her. If they

were just going to talk, he wasn't planning on interfering, but if it turned into a battle, he couldn't just sit still. He couldn't just stay quiet and wait for the triggered to be pulled. However, Kiriha was calmly staring at Tayuma.

“...Tayuma, do you know what pointing guns at me means?”

“I'll just report to Daiha-dono that the commander was betrayed and killed by the surface dwellers.”

“So you really did have it all planned out from the start.”

Tayuma had been planning to kill Kiriha from the start. That's why he had appeared where she was. If he reported that the peaceful Kiriha had been killed by surface dwellers, the People of the Earth would call for a military invasion. It was all going according to plan.

“That said, just killing you right now wouldn't be fun. First of—”

However, before Tayuma could move on to the next part of his plan, a familiar voice entered Koutarou's and Kiriha's ears.

“I've found you, underground people! Get away from those people!”

“Who goes there!?”

Surprised by the voice, Tayuma hurriedly turned around. The voice came from the roof of a nearby attraction.

“Red Shine!”

“Blue Shine!”

“Green Shine!”

“Yellow Shine!”

“Pink Shine!”

“All together we are The Sun Squad, Sun Rangers!”

Wearing colorful suits, the group of five posed, it was the heroes of justice.

“Wherever there is love, there is justice! In this world—”

“Open fire!”

While the Sun Rangers were still introducing themselves, Tayuma ordered his men to fire. As he did, the eight soldiers pointed their weapons towards the Sun Rangers and pulled their triggers.

What came out of the guns weren't bullets, but focused spiritual energy. They were spiritual energy beam rifles. The beam had the same effect as when Sanae used her poltergeist to attack directly. However, since the beam was focused, it held far more power than Sanae's attacks.

“Aaaaghh, we were still introducing ourselves!!”

A large explosion occurred around the Sun Rangers. The rifles’ power was overwhelming, and eight shots hitting caused a large explosion and the Sun Rangers were easily blown away by it.

“We just came and this is what we geee~t!?”

“Even though I came wearing blueee~!!”

“Nooo~, Baron-samaaa~!!”

“Ahh, my baked potatooo~!!”

“...It turned into charcoal.”

The Sun Rangers drew a beautiful parabola as they were blown away. Although they had been sent flying the moment they appeared, thanks to the strength of their suits, they survived without suffering any serious injuries.

“What did they even come here to do...?”

Watching the five fly off, Koutarou sighed.

The Sun Rangers had appeared after their sensor had detected the underground submarine. They had actually done the same yesterday; in the end, they had detected Kiriha's haniwas, but what they first picked up was the

submergence boat searching for Kiriha.

“Tayuma-sama, I believe they're the reported hindrances.”

“I see. So they noticed our movement and came here to get in our way. Quite admirable hard workers, aren't they? Kukukuku.”

Tayuma had his subordinates investigate the surface in preparation for a military invasion. A different battle squad from the Sun Rangers had then successfully obstructed the scouting party. The Sun Rangers had been misfortunate to face the underground's army, rather than a scouting party.

“Karama, Korama, full power to the spiritual energy field! Use elemental attacks as your weaponry and focus the rest of the energy into the field!”

“Roger Ho-!”

“HoHo-!”

The Sun Rangers’ appearance hadn't been for naught. Taking advantage of the eight soldiers attacking the Sun Rangers, Kiriha called over her haniwas and prepared for battle. The two haniwas floated next to her and enveloped themselves, Kiriha and Koutarou in a yellow light. The spiritual energy shield the two haniwas had created was thick. With this, they would be able to endure an attack from eight people. Following up on the shield, fire and electricity that would be used for attacking began running through the haniwas bodies.

“Oh, the automatons the Kuranos are so proud of? However, unlike those things designed for defense, ours are for combat!!”

A clay doll about a meter in height floated up next to Tayuma. The clay doll looked like it was made from ceramics, like Karama and Korama, but its shape was more of a square, and the design was very aggressive. The clay doll was a robot weapon just like Kiriha's haniwas.

“First, you attack with numbers and now with force? Shijima's bravery must

be very cheap.”

“Say whatever you want. That's just how war is! Jakko! Activate the spiritual energy field neutralizer!”

“Gaaaaa.”

Receiving Tayuma's orders, the clay doll roars and began emitting an orange glow. The clay doll then slowly approached the haniwas.

“Nee-san! He's begun eroding our spiritual energy field!”

“This is bad Ho-! We're losing in generator output Ho-!”

As the clay doll got closer, the yellow light enveloping Koutarou and the others grew weaker. This was due to the ability the clay doll had that allowed it to break through spiritual energy shields.

With one side trying to create a barrier and the other trying to destroy it, the side with the most power would win out. In this scenario, Karama and Korama were at a disadvantage. The haniwas were only about 30 centimeters tall, compared to the clay doll’s one meter height. Because of their large size difference, even together, they had less power than the clay doll. At this rate, their shield would be peeled off in no time.

“Tayuma, are you saying you won't stop fighting no matter what?”

“A foolish question! Now that we've come up to the surface, we can't return with nothing to show for it!”

“I understand. In that case, I'll prepare myself as well.”

Before Kiriha could finish speaking, she shook and gripped her left hand. Before anyone could realize, it was now covered by a blue gauntlet. This was a weapon from Kiriha's armory in her secret base.

“I definitely won't let you steal anything!”

Having never held a weapon up until now, Kiriha was now brandishing one

of her own. Since she sought a peaceful resolution, she had taken up arms to prevent a war from breaking out, no matter what.

“Wahahaha, how are you going to defend it all on your own!?”

Tayuma sneered at Kiriha. Convinced of his victory, he was now looking down on her.

“There's no one on this surface who would ally with you! The ones you're trying to protect won't protect you! Just sit there on the sidelines and watch as the future you fought for meets a tragic end!”

Tayuma raised his own weapon and pointed the barrel at the roller coaster.

“Curse you, Tayuma! I won't let you attack the surface!”

With Tayuma pointing his barrel towards the roller coaster, even the cool headed Kiriha began panicking. The amusement park was important to Kiriha, and amongst the attractions, the roller coaster was extra important. Kiriha then pointed her left hand, clad in a blue gauntlet, towards Tayuma.

However, Tayuma's subordinates stood in the way, blocking Kiriha. They were all pointing their guns at Kiriha and because of that, she couldn't attack Tayuma.

“Kuh!”

With Karama's and Korama's spiritual energy field being eroded by the clay doll, Tayuma's subordinates might be able to penetrate it. So Kiriha couldn't just attack and give the subordinates a chance to counterattack.

“Kukukuku, how whimsical of you to try and protect this scrap heap.”

Tayuma slowly aimed in on the roller coaster as if showing off to Kiriha.

“Stop it, Tayuma!”

“Your voice is starting to sound much better. I wonder what kind of sound you'll make when your beloved scrap heap collapses.”

Tayuma ridiculed Kiriha as he put his finger on the trigger.

However, before he could pull it, someone swung a fist towards him.

“Guwah!?”

“Quit messing around you bastard!”

The fist belonged to Koutarou, who Tayuma had completely forgotten. But it was only obvious for him to forget; nobody would expect an unarmed surface dweller to do anything. The same was true for Kiriha; her eyes were opened wide in surprise.

“Koutarou!?”

“There're things you just can't do!”

Koutarou yelled at Tayuma who had fallen over. He was unbelievably angry. He had completely forgotten who his opponent was and that his opponent was armed. He only remembered one thing, and that was that he definitely couldn't forgive Tayuma's actions.

“This is a place where everyone makes memories!”

“That's laughable!! What about it!? We don't care about that!!”

Tayuma wiped his mouth as he stood up. Having been punched by Koutarou, it was now bleeding. Tayuma's pride didn't allow him to accept that a younger man had hit and injured him. He glared at Koutarou as his anger grew in intensity.

“I could never let someone that calls this place laughable invade the surface! Kiriha-san would never call this place laughable!”

“Quit your howling, brat! In that case, I'll kill you first!”

Koutarou came swinging against Tayuma again. To fend him off, Tayuma pointed his gun at Koutarou. Because of their short distance, Tayuma barely had to aim to hit Koutarou.

However, Tayuma's gun didn't fire once more. All of a sudden, several laser

beams came pouring down from the sky and penetrated his gun. The attack destroyed his weapon and scattered the electronic system inside all over the ground.

“What!?”

“Good job, Theia!!”

Koutarou then swung his fist.

His fist struck the surprised Tayuma directly in the face. Having been punched in the face again, Tayuma fell down.

“It's not 'Good job, Theia', it's 'You saved me, my princess'!”

Theia's voice rang out from above Koutarou. The next moment, a one meter long, sturdy and compact aircraft-looking machine descended next to him. It was the small fighter that Theia had used to follow after Koutarou and Kiriha yesterday and today.

“You saved me, my princess.”

“You're always so reckless, really...”

Theia's amazed voice could be heard from the small fighter. The fighter had been left on standby above Koutarou and Kiriha and would protect them if things got dangerous.

Theia had given a sign only Koutarou would notice and looked out for a chance to attack together. In the end, Koutarou had gotten so angry that he went swinging at Tayuma before Theia could attack, but it did work out as planned.

“Theia, stop prattling and hand over the sword!”

“That's not it; you say 'Please give me the sword, Princess'!”

With Tayuma being attacked, his subordinates wouldn't just stand by and do nothing.

Half of the eight subordinates changed their aim from Kiriha to Koutarou. But by that time, Koutarou was already prepared to fight. He had pulled out a sword from a black hole that had opened up in the air and held it with both hands and took a stance. It was the treasure sword, Saguratin, and it had Theia's golden flower crest engraved in it. The stance was an old Forthorthe sword fighting stance.

“Smoke Discharger!”

As Theia spoke up, white smoke covered Koutarou. The smoke was being produced by a globe the small fighter had launched. With a fast chemical reaction, a large amount of smoke was created and almost instantly robbed the enemy of their vision.

“You idiot! I can't see anything either!!”

Koutarou lowered his posture and complained to Theia. While Tayuma's subordinates couldn't see through the smoke, the same was true for Koutarou.

“Calm down, Koutarou! It's all according to plan!”

“Koutarou!”

The next moment, Koutarou felt a familiar presence around his neck.

“Is that you, Sanae!?”

“Yes!”

He then heard Sanae's voice next to his ear. Sanae and found Koutarou in the smoke and was hanging off his back like always.

“I'll find the enemies for you!”

At the same time Sanae said that, Koutarou could see several glowing things inside the white smoke. The lights all had the shapes of people, moving carefully through the smoke.

“What is this!?”

“It's the opposite of when I can taste what you eat! I'm showing you what I can see!”

“I see, that's convenient!”

Having understood the situation, Koutarou began running.

The moving lights were all people. He could tell Kiriha apart from the rest since she had haniwas, and that meant the rest were Tayuma's subordinates. He couldn't give up this opportunity.

“You better compliment me lots after all of this is done♪”

“I know, I know!”

Using his sword, Koutarou destroyed the subordinates’ weapons one after the other. Koutarou and Sanae didn't have any memory of it, but this was the second time they had done this. Because of that, Koutarou was more easily able to accept the situation.

“This is not the kind of fighting a knight should be doing but...”

“No, you're a genius, Theia!”

Koutarou then used the flat of his sword to knock the unarmed subordinates unconscious. Having suddenly been blinded, they had no way of preventing Koutarou's ambush. They panicked and fired their guns at random, but that wasn't enough to recover from this situation.

“R-Really? You really think so?”

“Yeah, I owe you one.”

It was true that this kind of one sided fight wasn't something praisable for a knight. But Koutarou was thankful he didn't have to fight to the death. Since Koutarou knew of Kiriha's wish, he was even more so. Which was why Koutarou was extra thankful for Theia's plan.

“Koutarou, the smoke is clearing.”

After Koutarou had knocked out the four subordinates targeting him, the effect of the smoke-producing globe cut out and the smoke cleared. Since the amusement park was near the sea, the winds began blowing during the evening. Once the smoke stopped being produced, it disappeared almost immediately.

“So you've cleared things up over there too. Good job, Satomi-kun.”

“Landlord-san.”

Once the smoke cleared, Tayuma's four other subordinates were all lying on the ground. Instead, Shizuka stood where they were standing wearing large goggles. She had taken advantage of the smoke to sneak in and dispatch the four subordinates targeting Kiriha.

“Glad to see you safe, Shizuka.”

“As a martial artist, this wasn't a worthy fight when using this kind of goggles. It should be done using the mind's eye.”

Talking to Theia's voice coming out from the unmanned fighter, Shizuka took off her goggles. The goggles allowed the user to see infrared light, which let her see through the smoke.

“D-Damn, to think you had that kind of ambush lying in wait...”

Tayuma that had been knocked down by Koutarou a second time stood up. As he did, the clay doll separated from Karama and Korama and headed over to Tayuma to protect him.

“So what will you do now, Tayuma? Are you still planning on fighting?”

Kiriha approached Tayuma still wearing her blue gauntlet on her left hand. She was determined to use it if she had to.

Despite his disadvantage, Tayuma gave Kiriha a cold glare and boldly responded.

“That goes without question! If I can turn you into a sacrifice here, the

People of the Earth will choose war!”

Even if Tayuma and his group were defeated here, as long as Kiriha died, the other members of the radical faction would manipulate the truth and agitate the People of the Earth. By doing that, the result would turn out the way Tayuma wanted. He only had to ignore whether he personally won or lost.

“Do you think you can do that in this situation?”

“I don't.”

Kiriha, Koutarou and the others surrounded Tayuma. Even he knew that killing Kiriha would be difficult. Despite that he still laughed.

“However, the sacrifice doesn't have to be you!”

Tayuma smiled triumphantly. It was almost as if he had predicted this outcome.

“I see, your aim isn't me, it's—”

At that moment, Kiriha realized Tayuma's aim.

“Jakko, release the safety device!”

“Gaaaaa.”

“Karama, Korama! Focus the spiritual energy field around that automaton! Full power! I won't mind if you burn out your circuits! Block it no matter the what!”

“You're too late! Jakko, self destruct!”

“Gaaaaa.”

Kiriha and Tayuma gave orders at the same time. But since his order was shorter, Tayuma finished faster. Karama and Korama would not make it in time. Even if they did, having being weakened by the erosion, it wasn't a sure thing that they could block the explosion.

“Kukukukuku, Hahahahahaha, I win!”

Convinced of his victory, Tayuma burst out laughing. It all went according to plan.

Tayuma's strategy had two kinds of goals.

The primary goal was to assassinate Kiriha with his own hands. Once this goal became impossible, he started on his secondary goal.

The secondary goal was to self destruct the clay doll and turn himself into a sacrifice. Although they might not have had the influence of the Kurano clan, the Shijima clan still had considerable influence. If they just made it out so that Tayuma had been attacked by the surface dwellers and his automaton exploded in the process, they could then turn Tayuma into a martyr that was a victim of the cruel surface dwellers. And if the self destruct managed to get Kiriha involved as well, it would be the best possible outcome.

The reason behind the several scouting parties was to drag out the surface's battle squads. By doing that, they could put the blame on them instead. In reality, the Sun Rangers had appeared, which was why Tayuma hadn't attacked Kiriha until that point.

Once the Sun Rangers had appeared, all they had to do was destroy Karama and Korama that held detailed records of the events. The reason Tayuma had brought out a clay doll with the ability to nullify spiritual energy fields was to make absolutely sure that Karama and Korama would be destroyed. All he had done after that was to buy time for the field to get eroded.

Failing that, he would self destruct the clay doll and become a sacrifice himself. And if possible, the best outcome would be to kill Kiriha as well, but at worst all he had to do was destroy Karama and Korama. Kiriha's testimony alone couldn't overturn the radical faction’s combined testimony. Which meant that if just Tayuma died, it would be enough to shake the People of the Earth's opinion of the surface dwellers.

“With this, the People of the Earth can reclaim their glory! And I'll stand

alongside the heroes of history!”

It was Tayuma's victory. The clay doll would explode and Tayuma would die. At the same time, the haniwas would be destroyed, leaving no evidence behind. Making use of this situation, the radical faction would call out for the destruction of the surface dwellers. The age of war that Tayuma hoped for would begin.

The clay doll exploded. Tayuma's laughter didn't stop.

“W-Whaaa~t!?”

Until the explosion was blocked by Karama's and Korama's spiritual energy field, who weren't supposed to be able to put up the field in time.

“That's impossible! How!?”

The field was supposed to have been just a moment too late. Tayuma's order had been faster. And even if they had made it, the field had been eroded by the clay doll. Either way, they shouldn't have been able to block the explosion.

“It seems like the explosion was smaller than I thought.”

Not missing her chance while Tayuma was astonished, Kiriha closed in the distance between her and him. He noticed that Kiriha was closing in, but because of the large shock of his plan failing, he was unable to move.

“Quit messing around, as if that could happen! This is some kind of mistake!”

Tayuma couldn't accept the situation. The clay doll had more then enough power to kill him. Since he had confirmed that countless times in simulations, there was no mistaking it. Karama and Korama weren't supposed to be able to block it. But the explosion had been blocked, and Kiriha was now closing in.

“Then you were simply hated by the goddess of creation!”

The gauntlet on Kiriha's left hand began glowing. The gauntlet worked by turning the wearer’s spiritual energy into fire and electricity. At this time, Kiriha's spiritual energy was being turned into electricity.

“War will begin! I will become a hero! The People of the Earth's history will—”

“Allow me to advise you on something.”

Kiriha's left fist sunk into Tayuma's body while he was yelling. At that moment, the electricity around Kiriha's fist flowed through Tayuma's body.

“Guhah.”

Through precise control, the electricity knocked Tayuma out without killing him.

“...Next time, don't skip out on the prayers. For your own sake...”

Tayuma lost his consciousness and fell down on the spot. Seeing that, Kiriha had a somewhat sorrowful look on her.

“Ah, it looks like it ended safely.”

Someone was watching over Kiriha's and Tayuma's fight from afar. However, that wasn't the goddess of creation that Kiriha had mentioned, but a girl wearing a frilly pink costume. That girl was none other than our magical girl, Rainbow Yurika.

“Now I can finally climb down.”

Suppressing her fears, she had climbed up a tall pillar and watched over Koutarou and the others battle from afar and supported with her magic if necessary.

“I feel like I've gotten good at using my magic in secret.”

She had set up a ward to keep people from gathering, reduced the falling speed of the blown away Sun Rangers to keep them alive and protected the

amusement park and its visitors when Tayuma's subordinates had begun firing at random.

“I'm so glad everything worked out.”

And to top it off, she had contained the clay doll’s explosion.

Yurika had cast a defensive spell on the inside of Karama's and Korama's spiritual energy field. The explosions power had been terrific, but thanks to the two layered barrier of magic and spiritual energy, they somehow managed to contain it.

They had almost not made it in time, but Yurika had somehow managed to pull it off. Nobody else knew it, but today's hero was Yurika.

“Now all I need to do is head back to Ruth-san and everything will be fine.”

However, unlike every time up until now, she felt like it was a good thing that nobody knew. Problems should be resolved using your own power. Knowing that they would be helped through magic, a lot of people would stop trying. This was another sign that Yurika had grown.

And this was also for Yurika's sake. She wanted to stay as a normal girl for as long as possible.

“...But how do I get down from here...?”

Having used magic to her heart's content, Yurika had temporarily used up all of her magic power. Because of that she was unable to climb down from the pillar she was on.

“Save meee~, Satomi-saaa~n!!”

To Yurika, rather than having everyone know she had helped, she was more concerned with surviving this crisis.

Part 4

A few days later, another evaluation meeting was being held in the Sun

Rangers’ base. They had finally decided on their five individual colors, but today they were all wearing white. The damage they had suffered from the explosion and following crash had not been insubstantial. They were all wrapped up in bandages.

“All of our past problems have been solved, and we've confirmed that the enemy is being active in this region as well, but now we have discovered new problems.”

Like last time, Professor Roppongi was writing on the whiteboard.

“...And that's that we're all terribly weak.”

“We didn't even stand a chance.”

The White Shine with hair sticking out from under the bandages dropped his shoulders. As he did, the small White Shine next to him continued talking.

“Besides, in the other regions they would run as soon as they saw our allies, but here they came charging at us.”

“Yeah. They shot at us without hesitation. Not to mention, their weapons had a lot of punch behind them.”

The White Shine wearing shades spoke bitterly. He was confident in his firearms-handling ability, so he was quite dissatisfied with this defeat.

“Still, we were saved by the strength of these suits. It's almost a mystery that we survived.”

“I was sure I would die when Megu-chan came falling down at me.”

“Daisaku-kun, you don't need to put it like that!”

When the fat White Shine had been blown away, he had become the female White Shine's landing pad. Thanks to that, his injuries were just that much more serious. The female White Shine felt bad about it, but since she had a stubborn side to her, she protested.

“On the other hand, the underground people were defeated by citizens that happened to be on the site.”

“Which means that their weapons are powerful, but the soldiers themselves aren't all that strong?”

“Most likely. They might just have been recruits as well.”

“I see... so the situation was the same for both of us, but we lost due to the difference in firepower...”

“If my prediction is correct.”

Roppongi and the short-cut White Shine nodded at each other. However, the mini White Shine that had listened to them had a different opinion.

“But it might be that the citizens that defeated them are just special. It was Baron Demon-san and the others that did it, right?”

“That's right! Baron-sama is strong!”

Once Baron Demon's name came up, the female White Shine's eyes started shining. In her head, Baron Demon was already a deity. After hearing of his victory, it was like she was dreaming.

“Noo~, I want to be captured and tortured by Baron-sama as soon as possible! Ufu, ufu, ufufufufu...”

“...Megu-chan's opinion aside, if normal people could win, won't things work out if we try harder?”

The large man covered in plastic casts summarized the topic.

If Baron Demon could overcome the difference in firepower with ability, they should be able to do the same as long as they worked harder. If anything, they had a higher chance of doing so than Baron since they had their suits.

“Daisaku-niichan, do you mean that we should practice on our moves and come up with strategies?”

“Yeah.”

“Practice, huh, that's my specialty.”

“Strategies... Hey, I've been thinking, but shouldn't we just stealthily snipe them? We even have detectors.”

“Stupid, do you want to be scolded by Baron-sama again?”

“Then if we increase our numbers—”

“Quit messing around!! Hayato, you really don't get it!! Didn't you listen to a word of what Baron-sama said!?”

“T-That's not it, but...”

The discussion got complicated once more. Their first battle might have been a loss, but their morale was still high. They wanted to be able to produce results the next them they were sortied. All members shared that same wish.

They had finally been able to get to do their job since their demotion, so a failure or two wasn't worth considering. Whether they lost or were made fun off, they would get up as many times as they had to. At least in that aspect, they could be called heroes.

The Sun Squad, Sun Rangers’ battle had only just begun.

Roller Coaster

Part 1

Monday, December 21

Since Kiriha had apprehended Shijima Tayuma, his plan had completely failed. Karama's and Korama's records served as proof that backed up Kiriha's testimony. He was now awaiting investigation and trial.

And with Tayuma's plan exposed to the world, Kiriha's political rivals, the radical faction, temporarily stepped out of the spotlight. Since the underground people's opinion had changed, nothing they did would work out well. Even if Kiriha was to die now, the radical faction would be blamed. They had to wait out the storm before they could make any further moves.

As a result, Kiriha's surroundings became peaceful again.

As for Kiriha who had survived the crisis, she used the winter vacation and headed to the amusement park together with Koutarou once more in order to thank him.

“You don't really need to thank me.”

However, to Koutarou, he hadn't done anything that required thanking. Since he had become friends with Kiriha, it was only obvious that he would help her.

“Don't say that. I love this place. There're lots of rides I haven't tried yet.”

However, showing her thanks was most likely just an excuse. In reality, Koutarou was just a bonus, what she really wanted to do was ride the roller coaster. Since Tayuma had appeared, she had missed her chance of riding it. She had decided that she would definitely ride it today, and had been enthusiastic since the morning.

“Well, in that case...”

“Good. I'll be happy if you enjoy it alongside me.”

“Leave it to me. Playing around is my specialty.”

The two were walking through the park heading towards the roller coaster. However, just before it, Koutarou stopped for some reason. Noticing that, Kiriha stopped too and called out to him.

“What's wrong?”

“Over there. I was just thinking that the hole is already fixed.”

Koutarou moved his face a little to point towards the area he was looking. He was looking at the place where Tayuma had appeared on the underground submergence boat, creating a big hole in the ground. There were several workers that were working on fixing the pavement after filling up the hole.

“Koutarou, having a big hole like that here would be boring.”

“As long as there are happy memories being made here, everything is fine, right?”

“That's right.”

“And now you want to some happy memories regarding the roller coaster?”

“Of course.”

Giggling to each other, the two of them begin walking through the roller coaster again.

Thanks to Yurika's magic, the events regarding that incident had finished up quickly. Having cast a ward to keep people away at the same time as the Sun Rangers appeared, no one could see their fighting. And the event was covered up as a mysterious sinkhole suddenly appearing.

Koutarou and Kiriha had no idea what Yurika had done, so Koutarou just figured they had been lucky. Kiriha had assumed that the surface government had regulated the information. They had a difference in assumption, but they

were both happy that the incident had been safely resolved.

“As long as happy memories are being made, huh... Koutarou are you happy being here with me?”

Walking next to Koutarou, Kiriha suspiciously looked at him. They were closer than ever. So while he would normally panic from this situation, today there was no sign of that reaction as he instead smiled and nodded.

“Yeah. With you right now, it's not that bad. I don't have to worry about any weird intentions, since I already know what you really want.”

Up until now, Koutarou had been panicking because he didn't know her intentions. For example, in the past when she had been trying to seduce him, he didn't know if she was kidding or if she was serious. But things were different now. Knowing that Kiriha had someone she loved, it was obvious that she wasn't serious about her seduction. In fact, Kiriha would be troubled if Koutarou took her seduction seriously.

On top of that, Koutarou completely trusted in Kiriha. She might play jokes, but he believed that she didn't play around with people. So even if he was with Kiriha, he wasn't anxious. Like with Kenji, he was able to enjoy Kiriha's words and actions.

“It sounds like you're calling me a flimsy woman though.”

“If it sounds like it, it's probably the truth. But I like that kind of person.”

“Fufufu, then I'll take it as a compliment.”

“Yeah. If you hadn't chosen a man you'd want to be with, I would like to make a move on you.”

“Quit your lying, Satomi Koutarou. That's far too transparent.”

The two headed towards the roller coaster while joking around. This was a refreshing sight for those two. Everything up until today had led to a change in their relationship.

A man she wants to be with huh...

Once the roller coaster was right in front of them, Koutarou stopped moving once more, he repeated his own words on in his mind. He then looked over to the sign near the roller coaster.

'You must be at least 140 centimeters to ride this attraction.'

Koutarou then looked up towards the cars running on the railroad.

Hmm, something just feels wrong...

Imagining himself and Kiriha riding the roller coaster together, he felt like something didn't quite click.

“Kiriha-san.”

So Koutarou stopped Kiriha as she was about to cross the entrance to the ride.

“Yes?”

Kiriha quickly turned around. Her eyes were sparkling, like a child really looking forward to riding the roller coaster.

“We should probably not ride it.”

“Koutarou?”

Kiriha's expression clouded instantly. Since she had been so excited for today, she was very disappointed.

“Why would you stop now that we've come this far?”

“Hmm... how could I put this...”

‘It doesn't feel right’ wouldn't work as an explanation. Thinking about what to say, Koutarou racked his brain, before explaining to Kiriha.

“I really think you should ride it with your first love.”

“...Koutarou...”

At that moment Kiriha became aware of her own feelings, and her eyes opened wide in surprise.

Am I confusing Koutarou and that person...?

Until Koutarou had pointed it out, Kiriha had felt like she was about to ride the roller coaster with her first love. That's why she noticed that she was confusing Koutarou with her first love.

Taken aback by her own feelings, Kiriha looked up at the roller coaster. The complexly intertwining railroads looked like her own feelings to her.

“Either way, no matter what happens, that way would be for the best. Since you've waited this long, there's no need to compromise now.”

Koutarou lined up next to Kiriha and looked up at the roller coaster with her. But unlike Kiriha, Koutarou had no hesitation.

“I'll help you look for him, so let’s find that person.”

“...Yeah, thank you, Koutarou.”

Looking at Koutarou's smiling face, Kiriha noticed another possibility.

No... It might not be that I'm confusing Koutarou with that person, but rather that I...?

However, Kiriha couldn't reach a conclusion yet. To her, both possibilities seemed correct but at the same time wrong. Her feelings at the moment were very complex.

However there was one thing she knew for certain.

“What if we couldn't find that person, even then?”

Kiriha wanted to ride the roller coaster with Koutarou. She wanted some memorable experiences with her new found friend. So Kiriha couldn't stop herself asking that.

“Then ride with me. I'm actually very interested in roller coasters as well.”

“...I got it. Then I'll endure for today.”

Satisfied by Koutarou's answer, Kiriha agreed with him.

Regardless of who I ride this with in the future, I just hope my feelings are clear by that time...

Kiriha didn't know what would happen in the future, but she was mysteriously cheerful.

Part 2

“Right then, what to ride next...”

Leaving the roller coaster behind them Kiriha walked around the amusement park looking for the next attraction.

Attractions she'd been on, attractions she hadn't and attractions she’d been on but wanted to get on again. There were a ton of attractions that attracted Kiriha's attention.

Oh yeah, there was something I had to say...

Looking at Kiriha look around the area, Koutarou remembered that there was something he needed to tell her. It was something he had been thinking about since he had seen Kiriha fight Tayuma.

“Hey, Kiriha-san.”

“Yes?”

As Koutarou called out to Kiriha, she continued moving around the area while looking back at him. She moved around, almost as if Koutarou himself was one of the attractions.

“There's something I want to apologize about.”

“Apologize? What for?”

Kiriha tilted her head. She couldn't remember Koutarou having anything to apologize about. She could come up with a lot of things that she could

apologize for, but nothing that he could.

“When we first met, I said some horrible things to you, right?”

Koutarou wanted to apologize for what he had said when they had first met. Having no way of knowing her intentions, he had called her an idiot amongst other things. But having learned of her intentions, Koutarou noticed that what he had said probably hurt her.

“Of course you did. I'm an invader after all.”

Kiriha smiled as if saying that there was no need to apologize. She was prepared for the consequences since she wanted Koutarou to resist.

“That might be true, but still, I'm sorry, Kiriha-san.”

But even then Koutarou apologized. When he had apologized, he felt a weight drop off his shoulders. It wasn't just for Kiriha's sake, but also for his own.

“That sounds like you want to be invaded to me.”

Kiriha smiled mischievously. Koutarou had been so harsh with Kiriha because he wanted to prevent an invasion. By apologizing, it was the same as if he was allowing the invasion, both of room 106 and the surface.

However, Koutarou's glance remained calm, even after seeing that smile. He had absolute faith in Kiriha.

“Feel free to invade if you want. The surface, or that room.”

“Wha...”

“If you seriously want to that is.”

Hearing Koutarou's response, Kiriha noticed how happy she was.

So you won't mind if I invade... Koutarou...

Kiriha was unbearably happy. Deep joy filled her heart, and it felt like it would burst at any moment.

She was so happy that Koutarou had accepted her as a true friend. That was also the answer she sought for in her invasion. It was as if his answer affirmed her goal and actions. She had gotten what she had wished for. The joy of that was deep yet intense, so the normally calm Kiriha was barely able to hold back her tears.

“...Koutarou, in reality you don't want me to find that person, right?”

As Kiriha said that, she wiped the corners of her eyes. Even with her strong will, she hadn’t been able to keep herself from tearing up.

“Hm? What do you mean?”

Koutarou didn't notice her tears, and just smiled while looking at her.

“No, it's nothing.”

Kiriha grabbed Koutarou's hand while he tilted his head in confusion and began pulling on it as she started walking. If she had continued to face him, she would probably have cried.

“Let's go, Koutarou!”

“Yeah.”

Kiriha continued walking, heading for attractions she had never ridden with anyone before.

To make memories with the first real friend she had ever made on the surface.

Part 3

As the end of the year approached, even if the day was warm, the evening turned cold in a hurry. So to Koutarou, who had gotten another part-time job because of the winter vacation, this was a rough period.

“How about a cake for Christmas!? At the Harukaze Bakery, we're accepting reservations for Christmas cakes!”

Koutarou's new part time was handing out flyers dressed as Santa Claus.

Since the bakery by the station at the mall was selling Christmas cakes, Koutarou was in charge of the advertising. Today was December 22, and Christmas Eve was right around the corner. When it came to selling Christmas cakes, it had to be done today or tomorrow.

The most important time for advertising was when people were shopping or heading home. It was cold, but he had to work hard.

“How about a cake for Christmas!? At the Harukaze Bakery, we're accepting reservations for Christmas cakes!”

Handing out flyers to the people passing through the mall, Koutarou raised his voice.

A lot of necessities were required for the end of the year, so his part-time job excavating ruins wasn't quite enough. Because of Yurika, the food cost had risen, and because Theia was playing so many games, the electricity bill had also risen. And in the winter, the heating bill had increased, putting even more pressure on Koutarou.

Everything could work out if he relied on his father, but for him to acknowledge himself as an independent adult man he wanted to solve this with his own power.

“How about a cake for Christmas!? At the Harukaze Bakery, we're accepting reservations for Christmas cakes!”

There were a lot of people passing through. However, everyone looked busy, and only a few showed interest in Koutarou's flyers. He politely handed over flyers to those who would accept them. Amongst the people that accepted the flyers, only a few were actually interested in buying a cake. But it was important to think of everyone accepting the flyer as a customer.

After Koutarou had been struggling for a while, he heard an unexpected voice.

“Good evening, Santa.”

“Oh? Sakuraba-senpai?”

Harumi had called out to Koutarou. When he turned to the direction of the voice, he saw Harumi smiling in the cold winds raging through the mall. That smile felt like the spring sun to him. It was a welcome meeting that let him forget about the cold.

“Fufu, I think I've been a good child this year, so may I have a flyer?”

Smiling, Harumi was holding out her hands as if she asking for a present.

Afterword

Long time no see. It's the author, Takehaya.

The heat this summer has been overwhelming and I wrote this novel in the middle of that summer. It's now October and it's gradually getting colder, so I think I'll be able to catch up on the sleeping I missed during the summer.

This sixth volume focused around Kiriha. The circumstances for why she took command of the surface invasion force are finally revealed.

With this, all of the four invaders' stories have begun. Thanks to that, I bet your impression of the each character has changed from when the story first began. Having come this far, we're finally at the starting point. I'm really glad the series has gotten on the right track. This is all thanks to you readers, thank you very much, and I hope you will continue to support me in the future.

And regarding that anime preview, it should have reached the hands of all those who requested it by the time this novel is released... It did reach you, right?

Two points regarding this preview surprised me.

The first was that it has now been voiced. Since it was going to be used by HobbyJapan's production department as a promotion, it was only planned to have video and music. However, the anime studio, SilverLink, that had been hired to produce it showed their motivation and created a short story and added voice actors to it. Since it had been different from what they had been asked to do, I was surprised when I saw it.

The second point was that a portion of the lines are wrong. Since there were no lines planned for this preview, SilverLink had shown some goodwill when they made it. Because of this, there were no detailed character settings that existed, leading to a natural mistake. So I hope you could just laugh it off and forgive them. And if this novel really got adapted into an anime, this kind of mistake wouldn't happen, so it's quite the rare scenario.

I would greatly appreciate it if those who received the preview enjoyed it. And for those of who you didn't receive it, a portion of it is being showed on HobbyJapan's website, so please feel free to take a look over there.

To me, it's like I'm looking at my younger sister’s sport's meet; I'm half having fun, half nervous. Could this also be an author's fate? Personally, I found Karama and Korama cuter than I had imagined them. I wanted to see them move around more restlessly. Ho-, HoHo-!

With the preview complete, project 'Rokujouma no Shinryakusha' has swung into full gear. This is the crucial period for determining if this work gets an anime or not. I hope for even more support from my readers.

And now for my recent situation.

Recently when I go out to eat, I will encounter a cat from time to time. It seems like it lives in one of the houses I pass by, but for some reason it begins meowing whenever it sees me. When I paid attention, I noticed that the cat wouldn't do anything when other people passed by. It's almost as if it's trying to tell me something. I'm not sure if it's because it really likes me or really dislikes me. So when I met it next time, I'll try to establish contact. Will it let me pat it or will it scratch me? I'm anxiously awaiting our next meeting, cat.

On another note, I had more air conditioner running the entire summer. Since I use my computer for work during the day, it just has to be on. And during the warm nights, it has to be on for me to be able to sleep. Thanks to that, my jaw dropped when I saw the electric bill; it was almost twice as expensive as normal. Even though it's required for my work, I got to thinking about ecologics. However, by the time the novel is released it should be cooler, so I guess I'm safe for now.

The other day I saw a certain movie. That said, I didn't see it at the theater, rather, I bought the BD. The title of the movie was 'Moon'. It was a low-budget film but it was interesting with all the ingenious tricks they used. This

was more my type of movie, and I preferred over 'District 9' that I bought at the same time. I want to try making a work set in space some day. I don't know when that day will come though.

I still have lots of things I can write in this afterword, but I think I'll stop it here.

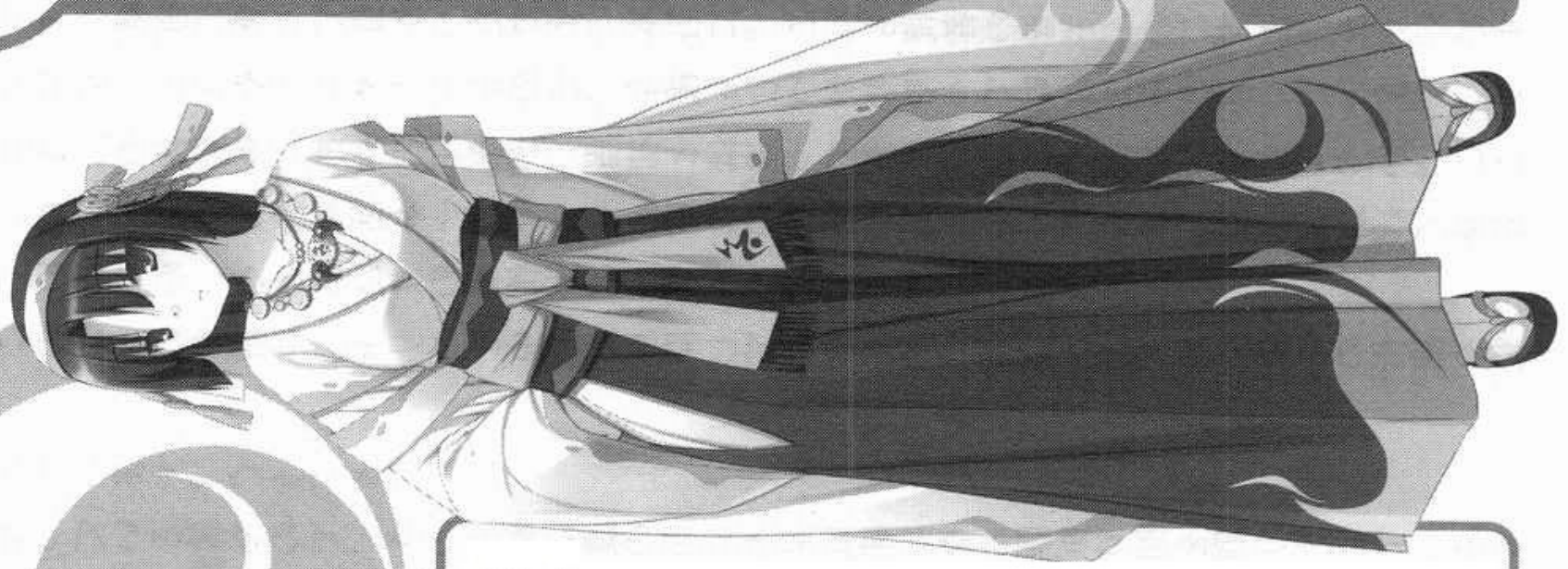
And finally, I'd like to thank everyone at the editorial department, Poco-san who always draws cute illustrations for me, everyone at SilverLink who helped make the preview, my friends who would give me advice and all of you readers who bought this novel.

Then let us meet again in the afterword of the seventh volume.

September, 2010

Takehaya

Corona Convention NEW! 2009/12/22



Article 10

Dating between those who have ratified the Corona Convention is forbidden.

In the case where this is unavoidable, it must be swiftly reported to Kasagi Shizuka (Landlord of Corona House, residing in room 206).

Article 10 Supplement

In the case of a relationship being report to Kasagi Shizuka (Landlord of Corona House, residing in room 206), it may be permitted.